

ARGOSY

and Railroad Man's Magazine
Issued Weekly

Sidney H. Robinson



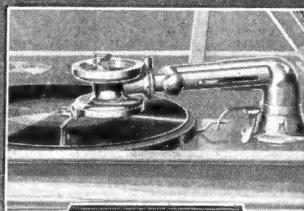
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"Author of
"A Legacy of Adventure," etc.

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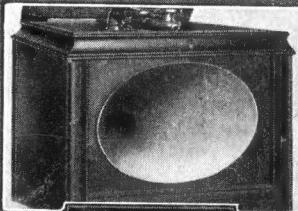
The BRUNSWICK Method of Reproduction



The Ultona



The Brunswick



The Amplifier

Two New Ideas Which Won Millions of Friends

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The Brunswick Method of Reproduction includes the Ultona, an all-record player. This master invention can be obtained on no other phonograph. The Ultona presents to each make of record, the proper needle and diaphragm. All at a turn of the hand. It is a unique reproducer, not an attachment nor makeshift.

The Brunswick Method also includes The Brunswick Amplifier, an all-wood sound chamber built with scientific regard for acoustic laws. No metal is used because it muffles sound vibrations.

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and Canada

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Musical Merchandise
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ARGOSY

AND RAILROAD MAN'S MAGAZINE

L. CVI **ISSUED WEEKLY** **NUMBER**

Vol. CXL

ISSUED WEEKLY

NUMBER 3

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In Our April 12 Issue—Next Week

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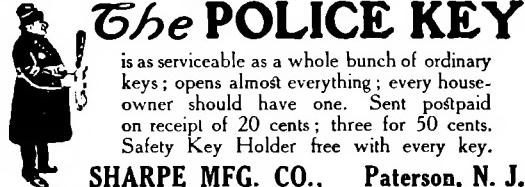
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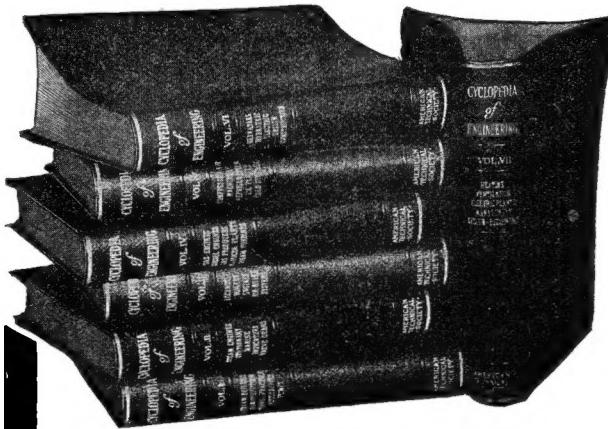
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Two fellow-employees, one a bookkeeper, the other a stenographer, decided that \$25 a week was not in keeping with the high costs of living. With such a salary there was little prospect of giving their wives and kiddies any pleasures outside of the movies, street car rides and summer outings in the parks.

They both decided that an income of at least \$3,000 a year was necessary and was not too much to ask for their services—if they could GET IT.

There was the rub. Each of them had a different idea as to how he was going to "put it over." On this one point they were at wide disagreement. Each was so convinced that his way was right, a wager was entered into between them as to who would be first to land a job at \$3,000 a year or better.

Mr. Bookkeeper's plan was to put up a bold front, to "bluff" his way into an important job—he was going to get there on his "nerve." He "positively knew" men who were less capable than he, and they got into good jobs, he claimed, by pure nerve backed up by a little luck. He was going to watch the "want ads" and apply for every attractive position so long as he thought there was the slightest chance of landing one of them. He scanned the newspapers day after day. After some several hundred attempts, and aided by the fact that the war had made men scarce, he finally secured a position at \$2,400 a year, but was fired and kicked out for incompetency after a week's trial.

He had actually put in an average of two hours a day over a period of a year and a half, reading the "help wanted" columns of the daily papers, writing letters of application, telephoning, scheming, dreaming and hoping. In not one case in twenty did he even get an interview. All his efforts were for NOTHING; nothing but another twenty-five dollar salary. He finished exactly where he started, after wasting a good part of a year and a half hunting jobs he was unqualified to fill.

Now, Mr. Stenographer had a different scheme—one that was practical and thoroughly tested. It worked out even better than he had planned. He "put it over" in a big way in exactly 300 hours—spare time, too. They were "thrift hours," he said, which can be saved out of the time men ordinarily waste in any 60 days of the year.

Mr. Stenographer, too, went over the "help wanted" columns of the newspapers. He was attracted by the large number of really big positions open to competent men. He noted particularly the unusual salaries—any number of them at \$2,500 to \$6,000 a year offered to Expert Accountants, Auditors, Cost Accountants, Comptrollers, Senior and Junior Accountants.

"Why this big demand for trained Accountants?" he asked himself.

That night he read a book, "The Awakening of Business" by Mr. Edward N. Hurley. When Mr. Hurley wrote this book, he was Chairman of the Federal Trade Commission. He claims that not one in ten American business men keep accurate accounting systems. They don't know their costs. They are losing money when they think they are making a profit. He said in effect that American business men have got to WAKE UP if they are going to be factors in the competition for world trade.

And American business IS waking up.

That is one reason why Expert Accountants are in such great and growing demand. Mr. Stenographer at once pictured that bigger income for himself as a trained Accountant. That night, in another section of the evening paper, he read an advertisement of an institution offering to train ambitious men in the principles of Higher Accountancy under the direction of a Certified Public Accountant assisted by a big staff of accounting and business experts. That institution was the LaSalle Extension University—the largest institution of the kind in the world, whose graduates are in demand in every organization where efficient, well trained men are needed.

Before Mr. Stenographer went to bed that night, he dropped into the mails an inquiry to the University asking for full particulars regarding their home study course and service in Higher Accountancy.

The very next day he heard a big employer say:

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LaSalle training is the shortest cut to an Executive Accountancy position ever made available to ambitious business employees. To those who have had no bookkeeping experience, it provides thorough instruction in Elementary Accounting principles. It enables intelligent men and women to prepare themselves from the ground up for important general accounting positions, including Auditing, Cost Accounting, coaching for Certified Public Accountant's examination, Federal Income Tax work, etc.

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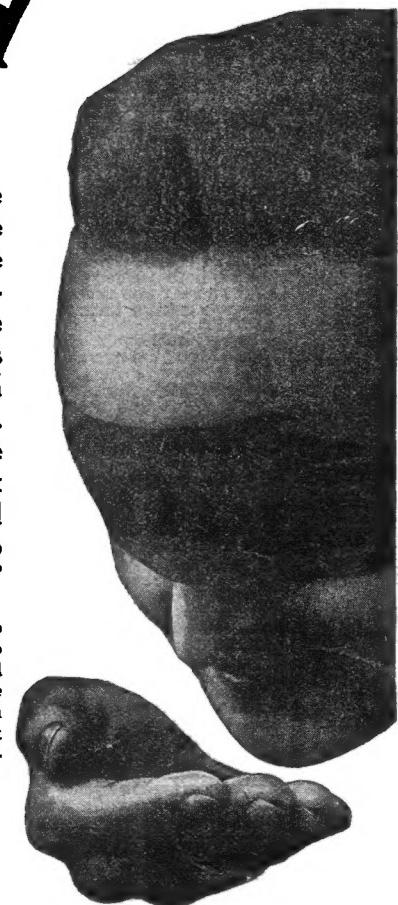
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Cold Steel

by George C. Shedd

Author of "Ships Triumphant," "A Legacy of Adventure," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE RECLUSE.

STEELE WEIR cast a measuring glance at the pile of chopped wood, then wiped the fine dew of perspiration from his brow, sank the ax-blade into the chopping-log, and seated himself upon a sawn block. A grim smile shaped itself upon his lips.

Though he never chopped wood now except on these rare visits to his recluse father's cabin here on the forested mountain-side, his tall, lean figure was as tough and wiry as ever; his arm as tireless, his eye as true to cut the exact line. There was yet no softening of his fibers, nor any fat on his ribs, and there would be neither if he had anything to say about it.

From the little Idaho town in the valley below, which he viewed through the clearing before the cabin, his gaze came around to his father seated on the door-step. Taciturn and brooding the latter had always been, but a poignant pity and sorrow struck at the son's heart as he perceived what a mere shell of a man now sat there,

gray-haired, bent, fleshless, consumed, body and soul, by the destroying acid of some dark secret.

Even when a lad, Steele Weir had sensed the mystery clouding his father's life. Like an evil spell, it had condemned them to solitude here in the mountains, until Steele's youth at last rebelled, and he had departed, hungry for schooling, for human society, and for a wider field of action.

What that secret might be he had for years not allowed himself to speculate. Unbidden at times, the memory of certain revealing looks or acts of his father's floated into his mind: a dread, if not terror, that on occasion dilated the elder man's eyes, and a steadfast driving of himself at work as if to obliterate painful and despairing thoughts, and an uneasy, furtive vigilance when forced to visit town.

Once, when a stranger—a short, heavy-set, bearded man—had unexpectedly appeared at the door, his father had leaped for the revolver hanging in its holster on the wall.

On catching a second view of the chance

visitor, he had exclaimed: "Not Burkhardt after all!" With which he burst into a wild laugh, the shrill, mirthless laugh of a man suddenly freed of a terrible fear. However, as he returned the gun-belt to its place, his hand shook so that he pawed all around the nail on which it was accustomed to hang.

Steele Weir would never forget that moment of panic, his father's spring to the wall and following laugh—the only laugh he had heard from those lips; and though but twelve years old at the time, he could not misread the episode.

On another occasion he found his father kneeling at the grave under the giant pine beyond the cabin—the grave of the gentle mother of whom Steele had but dim recollections—and his father's hands were clasped, his head bowed.

With an infinite yearning, he had longed to creep forward and comfort him by his presence, by a clasp of the hand, but the recollection of his father's habitual chill reserve daunted him, and he stole away.

On his own life the mystery had left its gloomy impress. A solitary and joyless boyhood, overhung by he knew not what danger, haunted by a parent's lurking fear and anguish, had made him a silent, cold, ever-watchful man, never entirely free from the expectation that his father's sealed past at some instant would open and confront him with terrible facts.

For that reason, at thirty-five he had never married. For that reason, he felt that the success he had made as an engineer, a success won by relentless toil and solid ability, rested on a quicksand. For that cause he had welcomed and executed with a cool, grim indifference to risk engineering commissions of extreme hazard, on which account he was known in the profession as "Cold Steel" Weir.

Who first had bestowed upon Steele Weir that sobriquet was not known. But it was not misapplied. Cold steel he had proved himself a dozen times in critical moments when other men would have broken—in pushing bridges over mountain chasms, in averting threatening mine disasters, in almost hopeless fights against bandits in Mexico. And yet, though admirers he had

by scores, he possessed no friends, no intimates, and as a man was still as solitary of soul as when a boy here at this lonely cabin.

Once again he put the question he always asked on his visits, and with no more hope of a consenting reply than before.

"I must be going to-morrow. Won't you come along with me this time, father? I want you to live with me, so that I can look after you and be with you. We can fix up a good cabin at the engineering camp. You're not so strong as you were; you could fall sick here and die and never a person know it. I doubt if you spend, in making yourself comfortable, one dollar in ten of the money I send you. You would be interested in the work of this big irrigation project I'm to build."

His father appeared to shudder.

"No, no," he muttered. "I've lived here, and I'll die here."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Steele responded. "Afraid you may become sick and die for lack of care."

"No. I'll remain, my son."

That was conclusive. It was the answer of not only thirty years of living at the spot, but of his secret dread. Steele saw once more the stark fear in his eyes, the fear of contact with men, of venturing out into the world, of precipitating fate.

For a time his father plucked his white, unkempt beard with unsteady hand.

"Where's the place you're going this time?" he presently inquired, without real interest.

"New Mexico."

On the elder's face appeared suddenly a gray shadow, as if the blood were ebbing from his heart.

"Where in New Mexico?" he whispered.

"The town of San Mateo."

His father struggled to his feet. With one hand he clutched the door-frame for support. The skin of his cheeks had gone a sickly white.

"San Mateo—San Mateo!" he gasped. "Not there, not there, Steele! Keep away, keep away, keep away! My God, not San Mateo—you!"

He swayed as if about to fall full length, gesturing blindly before his face as if to

sweep away the thought, while his son ran toward him.

"Father, you're sick!" Steele exclaimed, putting an arm about the other. And, in truth, the elder man seemed fainting, ready to collapse. "Come, let me help you in so you can lie down. I must bring a doctor."

Steele almost carried him to the bed. On it his father sank, remaining with closed eyes, and scarcely breathing.

"No doctor; bring no doctor," he said painfully, at last. "I feel—I feel as if—dying."

"I must bring a doctor. And I have a flask of whisky. Let me pour you a little to revive your heart."

The change the words wrought from passivity to action was startling. The elder Weir arose suddenly on elbow, glaring fiercely.

"Whisky, never! It brought me to this—it damned my life. If it had not been for whisky—" Without finishing the words he fell back on the bed.

The loathing, the hatred, the utter horror of his exclamation, banished from his son's mind further thought of using this stimulant.

"But the doctor?" he inquired gently.

"No use, Steele. I've been the same as a dead man for days. Just ashes. I want to die; I want to lie by your mother there under the big pine. And maybe I'll have peace—peace."

Steele took in his own the wasted hand hanging from the bed. He held it tight, with a feeling of infinite tragedy.

"You'll be yourself again soon," he said comfortingly, though without faith in the assurance.

His father's lips moved in a whisper.

"No; my time is here at last," said he. "But don't go to San Mateo, Steele—don't go, don't go! Oh, spare me that!"

"Would you have me break my word? I never have to any man, father. I accepted this offer and signed a contract. I'm morally bound; these men are depending on me. Were you ever at San Mateo? Was it something that happened there that makes you fearful to have me go? San Mateo is a thousand miles from here."

The face before him became like the face of a corpse. For an instant Steele's heart went cold in the belief that his father had died under the effect of his declaration. But at last the eyelids raised, the eyes gazed at him. And all at once the features of the harsh visage seemed softened, changed, lightened by a dim illumination.

"I see you now as you are, a man, stronger than I ever was," he murmured. "I lived in fear, but my fear was not for myself. Had I been alone, nothing would have mattered after your mother died. But my fear was for you—and of you. I was afraid your life would be blasted; I was in terror lest you should hate and despise me when you learned the truth. So I sought to conceal it."

"You had no need to fear that."

"I see it now. Tell me everything or nothing, as you wish, about your going to San Mateo to work; it will frighten me no longer."

Steele briefly spoke of his new work there, of the magnitude of the project, and the desire he had had that his father might be with him.

"I'm proud of you," his father said. "God knows I have not been the parent I would or should have been to you."

"It's enough for me if your heart's easy now."

"I feel as if I were gaining peace at last and—and I must speak. In San Mateo —ah, Steele, you may hear of me—you may have to fight the damning influence of my name and past, but I know now you'll come through it. And all I pray for is that you can retain a little love for me despite everything."

"Whatever it is I shall hear of my father, I should rather hear it from his lips than from strangers'."

The hand in his closed spasmodically. For a long time nothing was said, and the only sound in the room was the ticking of the tin clock on the shelf busily measuring off the seconds of the old man's failing span. To Steele, it was as if his father were slowly summoning the few remaining shreds of his fortitude to reveal the cancer of his past.

"I'm a branded murderer," he gasped.

" You never killed a man from a mere desire to slay," Steele responded firmly. " I, too, have killed men in fights in Mexico. The fact doesn't weight my mind."

" In the line of your duty; in the line of your duty. But I was drunk. He was a friend. When I became sober I saw him with a bullet-hole in his head."

" Do you remember nothing of shooting him?"

" Nothing, nothing."

" How do you know you killed him?" his son demanded, with inexorable logic. " What is the proof?"

A low groan escaped his father.

" Men said I had killed him. But my own mind was blank."

" Who were the men? Were they present at the time?"

" They were four — Sorenson, Vorse, Gordon, Burkhardt."

" Were you arrested and tried?"

" No. They helped me to escape. Because of your mother, they said, and because they said they were my friends. But I never felt they were really friends. For they were always against newcomers, and wanted to keep things in their own hands. You were only three or four years old at that time, Steele, so you wouldn't remember anything about matters there."

" What were you doing at San Mateo, father?"

Now that the hideous past at last stood uncovered, the son was able to turn upon it his incisive mind; he would drag out and scrutinize every bone of the skeleton which had terrorized his father and shadowed his own life.

Facts faced are never so dreadful as fears unmaterialized. And more, he sought with all the love of a son for circumstances that would mitigate, excuse, or even justify his father's act.

" I was ranching," was the low answer. " I had come to San Mateo two years before from the East, bringing you and your mother and considerable money. I bought a ranch and stocked it with cattle; I was doing well, in spite of the fact that I was new to the country and the business. Also, I was making friends, and I had been nominated for the Legislature of the Territory

to run against Gordon. But I had taken to drinking with the men I met — other cattlemen—because I fancied no harm in it. And then, while in a drunken stupor, I killed Jim Dent."

" Had you quarreled with him?"

" Never, never—till that moment I killed Jim. They said I quarreled with him then. But I remember nothing. Jim was my best friend; I would have trusted him with my life. Even now I can't make it seem real I shot him, though it must be true with those four witnesses."

" What of your ranch? Your political nomination?"

" I withdrew from the latter; that was one of the terms made by Gordon on which they were to help me escape, instead of turning me over for prosecution. And my ranch and cattle—I had to deed them over to the four men, too."

" Then their friendship wasn't disinterested," Steele said quickly, with suspicion dawning on his face.

" They weren't really friends—I knew that."

" How were they to arrange your escape?"

The senior Weir seemed to shudder at the question.

" By bribing the sheriff and county attorney. I was then to leave the country at once, never showing my face again, or I should be arrested. I was still half dazed by whisky and terror. I took your mother and you and fled this far, when my money gave out. So here I've remained ever since, for here I could hide, and here was her grave."

The look on the son's countenance was grim.

" What's the last thing you remember of the circumstance previous to learning Dent was dead?" he asked.

" Ah, though I had been drinking, I can remember clearly up to the time I stopped playing poker with Jim and the four men, for we were losing, and I felt they were working a crooked deal on us somehow. I asked Jim to quit also, for though I hadn't lost much, he was losing fast and playing recklessly. But he wouldn't drop out of the game; and when Vorse and Sorenson

cursed me and told me to mind my own business, I went back to a table near the rear door and laid my head on my arms and went to sleep.

"When I was awake again, Vorse and Gordon was holding me up by their table, and Jim was dead on the floor. I had come forward, they said, begun a big row with Dent, and finally shot him."

"Then the only witnesses were these four men who were gambling with him, who cursed you when you attempted to persuade him to drop his cards," Steele proceeded. "One of whom was your political adversary — men who were old-timers and opposed to newcomers, who pretended to be your friends, but took your ranch and cattle. It begins to look to me as if they not only killed your friend Dent, but double-crossed you into the bargain. Did you look in your gun afterward?"

"No. I was sick with horror of the accusation, I tell you, Steele. I had no way to deny it; it seemed, indeed, as if I must have killed him. And from that day until this I've never had the courage of soul to reload my pistol, or even clean it. It hangs there on the wall with the very shells — two empty, the rest unfired — it carried that day in San Mateo."

The son sprang up and crossed to the nail where hung the weapon. The latter he drew from the holster and broke open, so that the cartridges were ejected into his hand. For an instant he stared at them, but at length walked to the bed, before which he extended his palm.

"Look—look for yourself!" he exclaimed hoarsely. "You never killed Jim Dent; drunk or sober, you'd never kill any one. You're not a murderer. You're the innocent victim of those four infamous scoundrels; they deceived you, they ruined your life; and their damnable fraud not only killed my mother in her youth, as I guess, by grief and despair, but has brought you now to your death, too."

His father had raised himself on an arm to gaze incredulously at the six unfired cartridges lying in his son's palm. Then all at once his bearded lips trembled, and a great light of joy flashed upon his face.

"Innocent — innocent!" he whispered.

"Steele, my son — Helen, my wife! No stain on my soul!"

As he sank back Steele's arms caught him. He did not speak again, but his eyes rested radiantly on his boy's before they glazed in death.

Weir gently lowered his father's form upon the bed, covered it with a blanket. Then he walked to the door and gazed forth upon the sunlit valley. For him, and for his father also, the black curtain of the past had been rent in twain in the twinkling of an eye; but revelations are not to be calculated by units of time.

Some obscure process of mind, more profound and more sure than mere intuition, had prompted him to delve into the mystery and had established the truth in his father's case. He was as certain of his father's innocence as that the sun stood in the sky. Nothing now would ever shake that faith.

He felt no sorrow, no grief. Indeed, his spirit was lighter than it had ever been hitherto. Peace and happiness had filled his father at the final minute of his life; he had died with the knowledge that his hands were not red with the blood of murder. In that there was cause for gladness.

But what of his father's thirty years of undeserved torment? What of his ruined life? Steele Weir's gray eyes narrowed until they held but glints like knife-points. His bronzed features became as hard as the mountain's granite. The names of the men responsible for the hellish business were seared in his brain; and, never a mild man, there were slowly distilled in his soul at this moment a deadly hatred and an implacable purpose. If yet alive, they should pay the penalty.

"They'll beg to be put over a slow fire and end it before I've finished with them!" he grated between his teeth.

CHAPTER II.

IN A HOSTILE COUNTRY.

EASTWARD out of the Torquilla Range the Burntwood River emerged from a gorge, flowing swift and turbulent during the spring months, shallow and murmurous

the rest of the year, to pass through a basin formed by low mountains and break forth at last through a cañon and wind away over the mesa. In the cañon was being erected the huge reservoir dam which was to store water for irrigating in the future the broad acres spreading from its base.

A beginning had already been made, but the engineer in charge had met with delays, local opposition, and labor difficulties, until the directors of the company determined to replace him by a man capable of driving the work over all obstacles.

Steele Weir had finally been engaged as the best for the task. After his father had been laid away in a grave under the pine above the cabin he had traveled without pause to New Mexico. For a week he had consulted with the retiring engineer, studied maps and blue-prints, examined the work finished, analyzed the general situation, and then taken over the project.

What had been accomplished had been done well enough; he had no criticism to make on that score. But he perceived that Magney, his predecessor, had been dragging at the work, had been checked and defeated in a dozen ways, and, indeed, was only too pleased to escape from a difficult situation.

When Magney had whirled away in an automobile for the nearest railway point—Bowenville, thirty-five miles away—Weir strode to the dam site, where he located the superintendent directing the pouring of concrete in the frames of the dam core.

Atkinson was a man of fifty, with a stubby gray mustache, a brown, wind-bitten face, and a tall, angular figure. As Weir joined him, he was observing the indolent movements of a group of Mexican laborers with a speculative eye.

"They're not breaking any records, are they?" Steele remarked.

"I ought to land on them with an ax-handle and put the fear of God into their hearts," was the bitter reply.

"Well, why not?"

"Why not?" Atkinson swung about and stared at the other. "They'd quit to a man if made to do a man's work. I supposed Magney had told you that. A dozen times I've been ready to throw up my job;

I'm ashamed to boss work where the men can loaf and I must keep my tongue still."

"From now on they work or get out of the camp."

"What about that 'company policy'? Magney was always talking about of hiring nothing but local labor to keep the community friendly?" the superintendent exclaimed, grinning. "That made him sorer than everything else. Said the directors had tied his hands by promising no workmen should be imported. If they did, and I guess they did all right, they sure buncoced themselves. Keep the people here friendly, huh!" he concluded scornfully.

"They haven't been that, then?" Weir asked, with a slight smile.

"Does it look like it when the workmen won't work enough to earn their salt? They openly boast that we dare neither make them work nor fire them. They say Sorenson and his bunch will pull every man off the works if we lift a finger; and they all know about that fool promise of the directors. Friendly? Just about as friendly as a bunch of wildcats.

"This whole section, white men and Mexicans, are putting a knife into this project whenever they can. Do you think they want all that mesa fenced up and farmed? This is a range country; they propose to keep it range; they don't want any more people coming here—farmers, storekeepers, and white people generally."

"That's always the case in a range country before it's opened up," Weir said. "But they have to swallow the pill."

"Let me tell you something; they don't intend to swallow it here. They figure on keeping this county just as it is, for only themselves and their cattle and woollies, and everybody else keep out. The few big sheep and cattle men, white and Mex, have their minds made up to that, and they're the only ones who count; all the rest are poor Mexicans with nothing but fleas, children, goats, and votes to keep Sorenson and his gang in control."

"They've set out to bust this company, or tire it out till it throws up the sponge. They've spiked Magney, and they'll try to spike you next, and every manager who comes. That's plain talk I'm giving you,

Mr. Weir, but it's fact; and if it doesn't sound nice to your ears, you can have my resignation any minute."

"I've been hoping to hear it. From now on drive this crowd of coffee-colored loafers. Put the lash on their backs."

A gleam of unholy joy shone in Atkinson's eyes as he heard Weir's words.

"All right; that goes," he said. "But I'm warning you that they'll quit. You'll see 'em stringing out of camp for home to-night, and those who hang out till to-morrow will leave then, for sure. By to-morrow night the dam will be as quiet as a church week-days. They'll not show up again, either, until you send word for them to come back—and then they'll know you've surrendered. Magney tried it once—just once. And that's why you found me chewing tobacco so lamblike and saying nothing."

"Turn your gat loose," Weir said. And turning on his heel, he went back to headquarters.

Before Atkinson fired a volley at the unsuspecting workmen he crossed the cañon to where a cub engineer was peering through a transit. The superintendent had overheard a scrap of gossip among the staff one evening before Weir's arrival when they were discussing the advent of the new chief.

"What was that name you fellows were saying Weir was called by?" he asked the youngster.

The boy straightened up.

"Cold Steel"—'Cold Steel' Weir. Any-way, that's what Ferguson says," was the answer. "I never heard it before myself. His first name's Steele, you know, and he looks cold enough to be ice when he's asking questions about things, boring into a fellow with his eyes. But he's up against a hard game here."

"Maybe. But a man doesn't get a name like that for just parting his hair nice," Atkinson remarked. "He told me to stretch 'em"—a horny thumb jerked toward the workmen—"and you'll see some real work hereabout for the rest of the afternoon."

"And to-morrow will be Sunday three days ahead of time."

"Sure."

"What then?"

"You know as much about that as I do. Make your own guess." With which the speaker started off.

The morrow was "Sunday" with a vengeance. The majority of the laborers demanded their pay-checks the minute work ceased at the end of the afternoon Atkinson tightened orders, and by noon next day the last of the Mexicans had quit. The fires in the stationary engines were banked; the concrete mixers did not revolve; the conveyors were still; the dam site wore an air of abandonment. In headquarters the engineers worked over tracings or notes; and in the commissary store the half-dozen white foremen gathered to smoke and yarn. That was the extent of the activity.

Two days passed. After dinner Weir held a terse, long-distance telephone conversation, the only incident of the second day; and it was overheard by no one. On the fourth day this was repeated. At dawn of the fifth he despatched all of the foremen, enginemen, and engineers, with wagons, to Bowenville; and about the middle of the afternoon, accompanied by his assistant, Meyers, and Atkinson, he sped in the manager's car down the river for San Mateo, two miles below the camp.

Of the town Steele Weir had had but a glimpse as he flashed through on his way to the dam the morning of his arrival, twelve days earlier. It had but a single main street, from which littered side streets and alleys ran off between mud houses.

The county court-house sat among cottonwood trees in an open space. A few pretentious dwellings, homes of the few white men and the well-to-do Mexicans, arose among long, low adobe structures that were as brown and characterless as the sun-dried bricks of which they were built.

That was San Mateo to-day. That, with the exception of here and there a sloping wooden roof, was the fateful Mexican San Mateo of his father's tragedy. And every man of those guilty of the crime of blasting the elder Weir's life was yet alive; that much Steele had speedily ascertained. Yet alive: as if destiny had preserved them for his hands!

He anticipated that they would have no suspicion of his true identity. Weir was not an uncommon name. For them, his father had vanished thirty years ago. And men who could deliberately execute so infamous a plot as these had done would be men of nerve, little likely to be disturbed by fantoms. When, however, they had beheld him, and perceived a resemblance in face as well as in name to their victim, he imagined they would not be so easy in mind.

Before doors, and everywhere along the street, workmen from the dam were idling. As Meyers brought the automobile to a stop before the court-house, news of Weir's visit appeared to spread miraculously, and Mexicans began to saunter forward to hear what they expected, a suave invitation to return to work. The three Americans in the car sat quietly while they gathered.

Weir stood up.

"Who can speak for these men?" he demanded.

A lean Mexican, with a shiny black mustache and a thin neck protruding from a soiled linen collar, pushed forward.

"I am authorized to speak for them," he announced, disclosing his teeth in a smile.

"Are you one of the workmen?"

"I'm a lawyer, and represent them. You have come to persuade them to resume work. There are conditions to be agreed to before they will return. First, no driving of them by superintendent or foreman; second, full wages for these days you have forced them to remain idle."

"I, not the workmen, make the conditions for work on this job," Weir stated, in reply. "There will be no back pay; they can return to work only on the understanding that they work as directed. And they must start for the dam within an hour, or not at all."

"Preposterous!" the spokesman exclaimed angrily.

Swinging about, he rapidly translated into Spanish Weir's statement, at which jeers and curses broke forth.

"You see?" the lawyer addressed Weir, spreading his hand in an exaggerated gesture and lifting his brows.

"Ask them if they definitely refuse to

return to work on the terms I've stated, and at once," the engineer said.

The lawyer put the question to the crowd. A chorus of howls from the three hundred throats came in answer. The refusal was disdainful, immediate, and unanimous.

"We'll now discuss the men's terms," the lawyer stated urbanely.

"No. The matter is settled. They will not be hired again. Start the car, Meyers."

The roar of the engine swallowed the protests of the indignant Mexican lawyer; the crowd, in stupefaction at this abrupt ending of the conference, divided, and the automobile moved ahead.

"Drive to Vorse's saloon; I want a look at the man," was the engineer's next direction.

Into the place Weir and his companions entered. An anemic-appearing Mexican youth at the far end of the bar started forward to serve them, but a bald-headed, hawk-nosed man seated at a desk behind the cigar-case laid aside his newspaper, arose, and checked the other by a sidewise jerk of his head.

He received their orders for beer and lifted three dripping bottles from a tub of water at his feet. His eyes passed casually over Steele Weir's face, glanced away, then came back for a swift, unblinking scrutiny.

The eyes his own met were as hard, stony, and inscrutable as his own. Finally Vorse turned his gaze toward the window and, extracting a quill toothpick from a vest-pocket, began thoughtfully to pick his teeth.

"You're the new manager at the dam?" he asked presently, still considering the street through the window.

"I am."

"And your name is Weir?"

"You've got it right."

The questions ended there. The three men from camp slowly consumed their beer and exchanged indifferent remarks. At the end of five minutes the Mexican lawyer, clutching the arm of an elderly, gray-mustached man, entered the saloon.

They lined up at the bar near the others. The older of the pair regarded the

trio shrewdly, and ordered "a little bourbon." When he had swallowed this, he addressed the men from the engineering camp.

"Which of you is Mr. Weir?"

"I am he," Steele replied.

"Mr. Martinez here has solicited me, Mr. Weir, to use my offices in explaining to you the workmen's point of view in the controversy that exists relative to work. I'm Senator Gordon, and I have no interest in the matter except to see an amicable and just arrangement effected."

"There's no longer any controversy," Weir said. "The men stopped work, refused to go back again, and that closes the matter."

"My dear sir, let us talk it over." And the other, bringing forth a pair of spectacles, set bow upon nose.

"I gave them their chance, and they'll not have another. They've browbeaten this company long enough. I expected them to refuse, so made preparations accordingly. A hundred and fifty white workmen arrived at Bowenville from Denver this morning, and are on their way here now. A hundred and fifty more will come to-morrow. The case is closed, as you would say, Mr. Gordon."

The other's blue-veined hand shut in a sudden grip; his lips framed a snarl.

"The case isn't closed. We have the directors' promise that no outside labor shall be brought in here."

"It will be here to-night."

"You'll repent it; you'll repent it." He seized the whisky-bottle and poured himself a second drink. "As sure as your name's Weir, which I'm told it is."

Steele stepped nearer him.

"That's my name. Did you ever hear it before?"

The look on his face became grim and menacing; his eyes held the older man's in savage lease. Atkinson and Meyers, and even the volatile Mexican lawyer, Martinez, remained unmoving, sensing in the situation some deep current of unknown forces of which they were ignorant.

"You are the son of—" Gordon at last muttered, staring at Steele Weir's features with fascinated gaze.

"I am."

"And—and—"

"And I know what happened thirty years ago in this selfsame room!"

The whisky in the glass that the other still held ready to drink suddenly slopped over his fingers. The man's figure appeared to become more bent. Without a word he set glass on the bar and went out the door.

Weir turned his gaze on Vorse. The latter's right hand was under the bar, and he seemed to be awaiting the engineer's next move, tight-lipped, taut, watchful.

"That was for you, too, Vorse!" Weir flung at him.

And he led his companions out into the street.

CHAPTER III.

A COMEDY—AND SOMETHING ELSE.

TOWARD noon one day a week later Steele Weir, headed for Bowenville in his car, had gained Chico Creek, half-way between camp and San Mateo, when he perceived that another machine blocked the ford. About the wheels of the stalled car the shallow water rippled briskly, four or five inches deep; entirely deep enough, by all appearances, to keep marooned in the runabout the girl sitting disconsolately at the wheel.

She was a very attractive looking girl, Steele noted casually as he brought his own car to a halt, sprang out, and went to join her, wading the water with his laced boots. As he approached, he perceived that she had a slender, well-rounded figure, fine-spun brown hair under her hat-brim, clear brown eyes, and the pink of peach-blossoms in her soft, smooth cheeks.

But her look of relief vanished when she distinguished his face, and her shoulders squared themselves.

"Has your engine stopped?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I'll look into the hood."

"I prefer that you would not."

For an instant surprise marked his countenance.

"You mean that you desire to remain here?" he asked.

"I don't wish to remain here, but I choose that in preference to your aid."

The man, who had bent forward to lift one cover of the engine, straightened up at that. He considered her intently and in silence for a time, marking her heightened color, the haughty poise of her head, the firm set of her lips.

"To my knowledge, I never saw you before in my life," he remarked at last. "What, may I ask, is your particular reason for declining my services?"

She was dumb for a little, while she tucked back a stray tendril of hair. The act was performed with the left hand; and Weir's eyes, which seldom missed anything, observed a diamond flash on the third finger.

"Well, I'd also choose not to speak," said she, afterward, "but if you insist—"

"I don't insist, I merely request—your highness."

A flash of anger shot from her eyes at this irony.

"Don't think I'm afraid to tell you!" she cried. "It's because you're the manager of the construction camp; and if you've never seen me before, I've at least had you pointed out to me. I wish no assistance from the man who turns off his poor workmen without excuse or warning, and brings want and trouble upon the community. It was like striking them in the face. And then you break your promise not to bring in other workmen!"

As she had said, she did not lack courage. Her words gushed forth in a torrent, as if an expression of pent-up and outraged justice, disclosing a fervent sympathy and a fine zeal—and, likewise, a fine ignorance of the facts.

"Well, why don't you say something?" she added, when he gave no indication of replying.

Steele could have smiled at this feminine view of the matter that violent assertions required affirmations or denials.

"What am I supposed to say?" he asked.

Apparently that exhausted her patience.

"You'll please molest me no longer," she stated, icily.

"Very well."

He raised the hood and inspected the engine. During his attempts to start it, she

sat nonchalantly humming an air and gazing at the mountains as if her mind were a thousand miles away—which it was not.

"Something wrong; it will have to be hauled in," said he finally.

No reply. Steele returned to his own car, and driving into the creek-bed worked his way around her. When he was on the far bank, he rejoined her again, carrying a coil of rope. One end of this he fastened securely to the rear axle of her runabout.

"What are you going to do, sir?" she demanded, whirling about on her seat and glaring angrily.

"Drag you out."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!"

"Oh, yes," was his calm response.

"Against my wishes, sir?"

"Certainly."

"This is abominable!"

"Perhaps."

"I'll put on the brakes." And put them on she did, with a savage jerk.

But, nevertheless, Weir's powerful machine drew her car slowly up out of the creek upon the road, where he forced it about until it pointed toward San Mateo. Then he retied the rope on the front axle.

"Now for town," said he.

"Why did you haul me out of there? I demand to know."

"Why? Because you were a public obstruction, blocking traffic. If you had remained there long enough, you would have become a public nuisance, and it's the duty of every citizen to abate nuisances. No one would call you a nuisance, of course—not to your face, at any rate. But travelers might have felt some annoyance if compelled to drive around you; they might even have had you arrested when they learned you were acting out of wilful stubbornness."

In a sort of incredulous wonder, of charmed horror, the girl heard herself thus unfeelingly described.

"You—you barbarian!" she cried.

"Ready? We're off for town now."

"I'll run my car in the ditch and wreck it if you so much as pull it another inch!"

"I don't like to be frustrated in my generous acts; they are so few, according to common report. Well, we'll leave the car, but it must be drawn off the road."

When this was accomplished, Weir replaced the rope in his machine. Then he returned to her.

"What now? Do you intend to sit here in the hot sunshine, to say nothing of missing your dinner?"

"That doesn't concern you."

Weir shook his head gravely.

"You must be saved from your own folly," said he.

Before she had realized what was happening, he had opened the door of the runabout, swung her out upon the ground, and was marching her toward his own machine. Stupefaction at this quick, atrocious deed left her an automaton; and before she had fully regained her control, they were speeding toward San Mateo, she at his side.

"This is outrageous!" she gasped.

Steele Weir did not speak until they entered town.

"Where is your home?" he asked.

"Turn to the right at the end of the street."

It was before a house of modern structure, banked with a bewildering number of flowers and shaded by trees, that he halted the car. He alighted, bared his head, assisted her to descend, bowed, and then without a word drove away, leaving her to stare after him with a baffling mixture of feelings and the single indignant statement: "And he didn't even wait long enough for me to thank him!"

Nor did her perplexity lessen when her car was left before the door during the afternoon by one of the camp mechanics to whom Weir had telephoned from San Mateo, and who had put it in running order.

Weir himself proceeded to Bowenville, where matters regarding shipments and the unloading of machinery engaged him the rest of the day. Into his mind, however, there floated at moments the image of the girl's face, banish it as he would.

He had learned her name by asking who was the owner of the house where she had alighted, information necessary to direct the mechanic as to the delivery of the stalled car.

Hosmer it was; and the residence was

that of Dr. Hosmer. Presumably she was his daughter. And what a vivid, charming, never-surrender enemy! Lucky the chap who had won this high-spirited girl.

His own past in relation to the other sex had been starred by no love affair, or even episodes of a sentimental nature. The character of his work had kept him for long periods away from women's society; but further than this, there had been the shadow on his life, which, he recognized with a high sense of honor, laid upon him an obligation to carry it alone.

He felt himself bound to solicit no girl's affection or trust. He considered himself as unfree to seek friendships or favors. And in consequence he had pursued toward women a course of deliberate indifference that with increasing years had unconsciously made him more harsh, more hard, more silent and aloof, until at last he believed no fair face could arouse in him an interest or quicken his pulse.

But now the clouding shadow had been dispelled; indeed, it had been but a false shadow all the while. He had the right to breathe the air freely and mingle with the world as he pleased. Long-stifled emotions struggled in his breast. Sleeping desires awoke. His spirit swelled within the shell of the years' indurated habit. Then these feelings would subside in a wave of sardonic pessimism; for his youth was gone, his nature was fixed, and he would remain hard and cold to the end of his days.

Well, let it be so; it would serve him so much the better against his enemies. It was this thought that occupied him as he ate supper that evening in a restaurant in Bowenville; and his course presently may have been an involuntary revolt against the fetters of fate. His encounter and mild clash with the girl at the ford had stirred in him a strange restlessness, a fierce passion to rip to pieces the pattern of gray, commonplace things. And he welcomed the chance that presented itself for action.

The restaurant was of an ordinary type, with a lunch-counter at one side, a row of tables down the middle, and half a dozen booths along the wall offering some degree of privacy. In one of these Steele Weir was smoking a cigar and finishing his coffee

before making his ride back to camp. From the booth adjoining he had been overhearing for some time scraps of conversation when the voices rose in protest and answering explanation, in perplexed appeal and earnest assurance.

Weir's own reflections finally ceased. His head turned and remained fixed to listen, while the cigar grew cold between his fingers. For ten minutes or so his attitude of concentrated harkening to the two voices, a girl's and a man's, remained unchanged. Little by little he was piecing out the thread of the confidential dialogue—and of the little drama being enacted in the booth.

His brows became lowering as he gathered its significance, his lips drew together in a tight, thin line. He did not move when he heard the man push back his chair to leave the place, nor alter his position until there came the sound of the door closing at the front of the restaurant. Then he reached for his hat, stood up, and went lightly around into the other booth, where he pulled the green calico curtain across the opening.

A girl of about seventeen, of plump, clean prettiness, still sat at the table, which was littered with dishes. The cheap finery of her hat and dress showed a pathetic attempt to increase her natural comeliness. At this minute her face showed amazement and a hint of apprehension.

"What are you coming in here for?" she demanded.

"I want to talk to you for a little while," Weir replied, seating himself. "You will please listen. I've overheard enough of your talk to catch its drift; you came here to get married, but now this man wants to induce you to go to Los Angeles first."

"That isn't any of your business," the girl flashed back, going white and red by turns.

"I'm making it mine, however. You live up on Terry Creek, by what I heard; that's not far from my camp. I'm the manager at the dam, and my name's Weir."

At this statement the girl shrank back, beginning to bite the hem of her handkerchief nervously and gazing at him with terrified eyes.

"I'm here to help you, not harm you.

You've run away from home to-day to marry this fellow. Did he promise to marry you if you came down to Bowenville?"

"Yes."

"And now he wants you to go with him to Los Angeles first, promising to marry you there?"

The girl hesitated, with a wavering look.

"Yes."

"He gives you excuses, of course. But they don't satisfy your mind, do they? They don't satisfy mine, at any rate. It's the old trick. Supposing, when you reached the coast, he didn't marry you after all, and put you off with more promises, and after a week or two abandoned you?"

"Oh, he wouldn't do that!" she cried with a gulp.

"That's just what he's planning. He didn't meet you here until after dark, I judge. You'll both go to the train separately—I overheard that part. Afterward he could return and deny that he had ever had anything to do with you, and it would simply be your word against his. And which would people hereabouts believe, tell me that—which would they believe, yours or his, after you had gone wrong?"

The girl sat frozen. Then suddenly she began to cry, softly and with jerks of her shoulders. Weir reached out and patted her arm.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Mary—Mary Johnson."

"Mary, I'm interfering in your affairs only because I know what men will do. You must take no chances. If this fellow is really anxious to marry you, he'll do it here in Bowenville."

After a few sobs she wiped her eyes.

"He said he didn't dare get the license in San Mateo, or his folks would have stopped our marriage."

"Then you could stay here to-night, go to the next county seat and be married to-morrow. His parents are bound to learn about it once you're married. A few days more or less makes no difference. And though I should be back at my work, I'll just stay over a day and take you there in my car to-morrow to see that you're married straight and proper. Why go clear to Los Angeles?"

"He said it would be our honeymoon—and—and I had never been away from here."

"What's his name?"

She hesitated in uncertainty whether or not she should answer.

"Ed Sorenson," came at last from her lips.

Steele Weir slowly thrust his head forward, fixing her with burning eyes.

"Son of the big cattleman?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir."

"And you love him?"

"Yes; oh, yes!"

Weir sat back in his seat, lighted a cigarette, and stared past her head at the opposite partition. The evil strain of the father had been continued in the son and, cited by her physical freshness and the expectation that she would be an easy prey, was working here to seduce this simple, ignorant girl.

"Well, I doubt if he loves you," he said presently.

"He does, he does!"

"If he really does above everything else in the world, he'll be willing to marry you openly, no matter what his father may say or do. That's the test, Mary. If he's in earnest, he'll agree at once to go with us to the next county seat to-morrow and be married there by a minister. Isn't that true? Answer me that squarely; isn't it true?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then by that we'll decide. If he agrees to it, well and good; if he refuses, that will show him up—show he never had any intention of marrying you. I'm a stranger to you, but I'm your friend. And you're not going to Los Angeles unmarried!"

The last words were uttered in a level, menacing tone that caused Mary Johnson to shiver. To her, reared in the humble adobe house on her father's little ranch on Terry Creek, a man who could manage the great irrigation project seemed a figure out of her ken, a vast form working against the sky. His statements were not to be disputed, whatever she might think.

"Yes, sir," she said, just above a whisper.

"All right. Now we'll wait for him. He was coming back for you, wasn't he?"

"Yes. I was to stay at the hotel till train time."

"Is this your grip?"

Weir jerked a thumb toward a worn canvas "telescope" fastened with a single shawl strap, resting in the corner of the booth.

"It's mine. Yes, sir."

"How old is Ed Sorenson?" he asked, after a pause.

"About thirty, maybe."

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen next month."

"But sixteen yet this month?"

"Yes, sir."

He said nothing more. As the minutes passed, her timorous gaze continued steadfastly on the stern, graven image of the man. She dully expected something terrible to happen when Ed Sorenson appeared, for she knew Ed would be angry; but she had been powerless to prevent the intrusion of this terrible stranger.

Fear, in truth, a fear that left her heart cold, was her feeling as she contemplated him. Yet under that, was there not something else? A sense of safety, of comforting assurance, of protection?

"You—you won't hurt Ed if he won't go with us?" she asked, in a low voice. "If he gets mad and won't marry me here; I mean?"

The man's eyes came round to hers.

"I'll just break him in two, nothing more, Mary," was the calm answer.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ENEMY'S SPAWN.

THE curtain to the booth was flung back. "I've the train tickets; come along to the hotel—" exclaimed the man who quickly entered. But the words died in his mouth at sight of Weir sitting in the place he had vacated.

He was over average height, of strong, fleshy build, with a small, blond mustache on his upper lip. Under his eyes little pouches had already begun to form; his mouth was full and sensual; but he still retained an air of liveliness, of carelessness and agility, that might at first sight seem

the spontaneity of youth. He wore a brown suit, a gray flannel shirt, and Stetson hat—the common apparel of the country.

"Who the devil are you? And what are you butting in here for?" he exclaimed with a vicious spark showing in his pale-blue eyes. At the same time he clapped a hand on Weir's shoulder, closing it in a hard grasp.

Instantly Weir struck the hand off with his fist.

"Keep your dirty flippers to yourself," he said, rising.

The blood faded from the other's countenance, leaving it white with rage.

"Get out of this booth, or I'll throw you out."

It was Weir's turn to act. Like a flash he caught Sorenson's elbow, jerked him forward, spun him about, and dropped him upon the chair.

"Sit there, you cradle-robber, until I'm through with you," he commanded. "And if you don't want everybody in this restaurant to know about your business with this girl, you'll lower your voice when you talk."

Sorenson shot an uneasy glance toward the curtain, and his wrath became not less furious, but better controlled. Clearly public' attention was the last thing he desired in this affair. He leaned back, staring at Steele Weir insolently, and produced a cigarette, at which he began to puff.

"Mary, get ready. We'll be going in a minute," said he.

"No, you'll not, Sorenson. I've taken a hand in your game. This girl says you're going to marry her—is that right?" The other rolled his eyes upward and began to whistle a jig tune softly. "Well, this is the plan she and I've made. She'll remain at the hotel to-night—as will you and I—and to-morrow we'll drive to another county-seat in my car and you'll secure a license there. Then you'll go to a minister's, where I'll act as a witness, and the ceremony will be performed. Afterward the pair of you can proceed to Los Angeles, or elsewhere, as you please, on your wedding journey."

"You're quite a little planner, aren't you?" the other jeered.

"That's the arrangement if you agree."

"I don't agree."

Mary Johnson, in whose eyes a light of hope had dawned during Weir's low-toned statement, began nervously to bite her lip.

"Won't you do it, Ed?" she asked, timidly.

"We'll do as I planned, or nothing," he stated. Then with sudden spite he continued: "You're responsible for this mix-up. What did you let this fellow in here for while I was gone? Didn't you have sense enough to keep your mouth shut?"

Steele halted him by a gesture.

"Don't begin abusing her; you're not married to her yet. I overheard your talk and saw the low-lived, scoundrelly trick you proposed to play on her."

"You damned eavesdropper—"

"Sure, eavesdropper is right," Weir interrupted coolly. "So I just stepped in here from my booth next door to discuss the situation with her; you can't mislead an innocent girl like this with the intention of shaking her when you get her into a city, not if I know about it and am around. If you sincerely intend to marry her, and will do so to-morrow in my presence, then I'll withdraw. Afterward I mean, of course."

Sorenson arose.

"Come, Mary." Then to Weir: "Stand aside, you!"

"She doesn't go with you," the engineer stated.

For a moment the men's eyes locked—those of one full of blue fire and hatred, those of the other quiet as pieces of flint.

"And she shall go with me while I telephone to your father that you brought her here under promise of marriage, a girl of sixteen without her own parents' consent, and that you now refuse to marry her," Steele added.

A sneer twisted the other man's mouth.

"My father happens to be in the East, where he's been for a month," he mocked. "If he was here, he wouldn't believe you; he'd know you were a liar. He knows I'm engaged to marry—"

Bite off the words as he tried, they had escaped.

"Ah, that's the way of it!" Weir re-

marked with a silky smoothness. " You expect to marry some other girl—and have no intention whatever of marrying Mary here."

" To hell with you and your opinions!"

" First, you coax her to Bowenville with a promise, then you persuade her to go to Los Angeles with more promises," the engineer proceeded steadily, " and there you would betray and abandon her to a life on the streets, like the yellow cur you are."

Sorenson snapped his fingers and moved round to the girl's side.

" Pay no attention to him," he addressed her. " He's only a crazy fool."

But she drew back against the wall, staring at him with a strained, searching regard.

" Will you marry me to-morrow, as he says?" she asked anxiously.

" No. I explained the reason once. Come on; let's get away from him. Then I'll make everything clear and satisfactory to you."

For a moment she stood wavering in indecision, picking at her handkerchief, her face pale and unhappy, questioning his countenance. Finally she turned to look at Steele Weir, standing silently by.

" You never said you were engaged to another girl; you told me I was the only one you loved," she muttered in a choked voice. " But I see now you won't marry me. You wish me to go with you—but not to marry me. I'm going away—away anywhere. By myself! Where I'll never see any one!" Burying her face in her hands, she shook with sobs.

" This is what comes from your putting an oar in," said Sorenson, lifting his fist in a burst of fury to strike Weir.

The latter at once smote him across the mouth with open palm at the vile epithet that followed. Sorenson staggered, then lunged forward, tugging at something in his hip-pocket, while the table and dishes went over in a crash.

Before he could draw the weapon Steele's fingers shot forth and seized his wrist; his other hand closed about Sorenson's throat in an iron grasp. Slowly under that powerful grip, the younger man's struggles ceased, his eyes dilated, his knees yielded and gave way. The revolver was wrenched from his

numbed hold. His eyeballs seemed afire; his breast heaved in violent spasms for the denied breath; and his heart appeared about to burst.

" You miserable skunk!" Weir said, barely moving his mouth. " I ought to choke the life out of you." Then he released his hold. " I'll keep this gun—and use it if you ever try to pull another on me! Now, make tracks. Remember, too, to pay your bill as you go out."

When Sorenson had straightened his coat, giving Weir a malignant look during the process, he departed. His air of disdainful insolence had quite evaporated, but that he considered the action between them only begun was plain, though he spoke not a word. Weir, however, heard him give a quieting explanation to the waiter hovering outside, who had been drawn by the crash of dishes.

" Thought a fight was going on," the aproned dispenser of food said to Steele, when he and the girl emerged.

" Just an accident. Nothing broken, I imagine," was the response.

" You can't break those dishes with a hammer; they're made for rough work."

" If there's any damage, this may cover it." And Steele tossed him a dollar.

Outside the restaurant he slipped his hand into Mary Johnson's arm and led her along the street. With him he had brought the old strapped grip.

" Where you taking me?" she asked, in a worried quaver.

" Home, Mary."

" Oh, I'm afraid to go home."

" Are you afraid of your own father and mother? They're the ones to trust first of all."

" But when father—mother is dead—sees the telescope, he'll want to know where I've been. He doesn't know I have it. I told him I might stay with a girl at San Mateo overnight, and then sneaked it out."

" The best thing is to tell him all about it."

" Oh, I can't."

" Then I shall. Leave that part to me."

And though her heart was filled with fresh alarms and fears at the prospect, there seemed nothing else to do. She longed to

flee, to hide in some dark hole, to cover her shame from her father and the world, but in the hands of this determined man she felt herself powerless. What he willed, she dumbly did.

Terry Creek flowed out of the mountains four miles north of San Mateo, an insignificant stream entering the Burntwood half-way down to Bowenville. The Johnson ranch-house was a mile up the cañon, where the rocky walls expanded into a grassy park of no great area. They reached the girl's home about half past nine that night.

For two hours Weir remained talking with the father, describing the occurrence at Bowenville, fending off his first bitter anger at the girl, and gradually persuading him to see that Mary had been deceived, lured away on hollow promises, and was guiltless of all except taking him into their confidence.

At last peace was made. Mary wept for a time, and was patted on the head by her rough, bearded father, who exclaimed: "There, there, don't cry. You're back again; we'll just forget it."

Outside of the house, however, where he had accompanied Weir to his car, he said with an oath:

"But I'll not forget Ed Sorenson, if I go to hell for it. My little girl!"

"She's half a child yet, that's the worst of his offense," Steele replied, savagely.

"Mary said you choked him."

"Some. Not enough."

"I'll not forget him—or you, Mr. Weir."

Steele mounted into his machine. He thoughtfully studied the rancher's bearded, weather-tanned face, illuminated by the moonlight.

"At present I'd say nothing about this matter to any one. Later on you may be able to use it in squaring accounts."

"I hope so," was the answer, with a bitter note. "But talking would only hurt Mary, not Ed Sorenson. Whatever the Sorensens do is all right, you know, because they're rich. The daughter of a poor man like me would get all the black end of the gossip; and I can't lift a finger, that's what grinds me, unless I go out and shoot him, then hang for it. For he's got a mort-

gage on my little bunch of stock, and on my ranch here. If I opened my mouth about his son, I'd be kicked off of Terry Creek, lock, stock, and barrel.

"That's the way Sorenson keeps all of us poor devils, white or Mexican, eating out of his hand. I've just been poor since I came here a boy; the gang in San Mateo won't let anybody but themselves have a chance. And I reckon old man Sorenson wouldn't care much if his boy had ruined my girl. Cuss him a little, maybe; that would have been all. But I won't forget the whelp. Some day my chance will come to play even."

"Sure; if one just keeps quiet and waits," Steele agreed. "Well, I must hit the trail. If you want work any time, come over to the dam; we can always use a man with a team."

Johnson nodded.

"After hayin's done, maybe. And, remember, I'm much obliged to you for looking after my little girl. I won't forget that, either."

He reached up diffidently and shook hands with the engineer. Weir's grip was strong and sincere.

CHAPTER V.

A SECRET CONFERENCE.

ON a certain afternoon Felipe Martinez, the lean and restless attorney who had acted as the Mexican workmen's mouth-piece, observed through the broad plate-glass window of the San Mateo Cattle Company's office an incident that greatly interested him.

For the moment he forgot the resentment kindled by Sorenson's abrupt refusal and brutal words when he asked for the nomination for county attorney. The election was in the autumn; the nomination was equivalent to election; and Felipe considered that he had too long been kept apart from that particular spoil.

Martinez had once had a slight difference with the cattleman, and now outrageously Sorenson had recalled it. He had stated that Martinez should hold no office; he gave offices only to men who did exactly as he

said; his exact words were that the Mexican was "tricky and no good."

And picking up his hat, Sorenson, who had that day returned home from the East, went out of the building, leaving Martinez to stare out the window and meditatively twist a point of his silky black mustache.

It was before the window that there occurred the meeting between Sorenson and the manager of the dam. Martinez perceived the two men glance at each other and pass, but after a step or two both men halted. As if worked by a single wire, they slowly swung about and took stock of each other.

The Mexican's nimble brain calculated that they could not have previously met, and in consequence their conduct bespoke something out of the ordinary.

The pair stood exactly where they had turned, three or four paces apart, he noted. The Mexican's mind palpitated with a slight thrill of excitement. The manner of each of the men was that of a fighting animal looking over another animal of the same sort—neither uttering a word, nor stirring a finger, nor yielding a particle in his mixed, unwinking gaze.

Martinez could almost feel the exchanged challenge, the cold antagonism, the hostile curiosity, the matching of wills, the instant hate between the men.

Though they had not met before, to be sure, nevertheless they were enemies. Was it because of the discharge of the workmen? Then Martinez's mind flashed back to the scene in Vorse's saloon when Gordon had shown such sudden emotion at the engineer's words and the latter's enigmatical reference to some event in the past.

That was it! Something which had occurred thirty years ago, something probably crooked. Men did things in those early days that they would now like to forget. He would look into the matter.

Sorenson passed out of sight, and Weir likewise proceeded on his way. Thereupon the lawyer sauntered over to the courthouse, where presently he became engrossed in a pile of tomes in the register's office. As examining records is a part of a lawyer's regular work, it never aroused curiosity in any one.

That same evening Martinez perceived Vorse enter Sorenson's office. Vorse, he recalled, had been included in the engineer's threatening attentions to Gordon. Shortly thereafter Gordon himself ambled along the street and passed through the door. Last, Burkhardt, short, fleshy, and bearded, went into the building.

Presently Martinez strolled by the office, outwardly displaying no interest in the structure, but furtively seeking to catch a glimpse of the interior through a crack of the drawn shade. But in this he was unsuccessful.

Of one thing he was certain, however. His prolonged examination of the county records had revealed an old bill of sale of a ranch and cattle from one Joseph Weir to Sorenson, Vorse, Gordon, and Burkhardt. He had placed his finger on one link connecting the engineer with these men, the entire four, as this old bill of sale thus recorded showed the intimate though unexpressed partnership of the men, which was common knowledge over the country. And intuition told him also that this private conference by the quartet hard on Sorenson's return home had its inspiration in the new manager of the dam.

Martinez determined to continue his investigations. Events might prove that it would have been much better for the cattleman to have given him the political nomination. In any case, it would do no harm to have "something on" Sorenson and the others—these rulers of San Mateo—for future use. And there was the other side of the affair—Weir's side—so it looked as if there might be profit either way.

The four men sitting in the railed-off space in the San Mateo Cattle Company's office made up the cattle company. Moreover, they made up the financial, political, and other powers of this remote section of New Mexico.

In face, manner, garb, they were dissimilar. Vorse, clothed in gray, was hawk-nosed and impassive; and though now, like his companions, wealthy beyond simple needs, he continued the operation of the saloon that had been a landmark in San Mateo for forty years.

Burkhardt was rough-featured, rough-tongued, choleric, and coatless; typically the burly, uncurried, uncouth stockman, whose commonest words were oaths or curses, and whose way with obstinate cattle or men was the way of the club or the fist.

Gordon was the wily, cautious, unscrupulous politician; he had represented San Mateo in the Legislature for years, both during the Territorial period and since New Mexico had become a State, and was not unknown in other parts of the Southwest; and he engaged himself ostensibly in the insurance and real estate business.

Like the others, his share of the large cattle, sheep, and land holdings of the group made him independent.

Sorenson, the last of the four, and in reality the leader because of a greater breadth of vision and a natural capacity for business, was dressed in a tailored suit of greenish plaid—a man with bushy eyebrows, a long, fleshy nose, predatory eyes, a heavy, catfish mouth, and a great, barrel-like body, which reared two or three inches over six feet when he stood on his feet. But one thing they had in common, in addition to the gray hair of age, and that was a joint liability for the past.

For years they had believed that that liability had been extinguished through the operation of time. They had considered the account of early secret, lawless acts by which they had acquired wealth and a grip on the community as closed and sealed. They were now law-observing members of society; they controlled, even if they sometimes failed to possess, the good will of the county—and they were not men to measure position by friendships; their councils determined how much or how little other men should own, and in local politics their fingers moved the puppets that served their will.

With the entrance of the powerful group of financiers who were constructing the irrigation project they recognized the threat to their old-time supremacy. Cattle and sheep interests would succumb to farming, a swarm of new, independent settlers would arrive like locusts, and their leadership would eventually be challenged if not ended.

New towns would spring up; new money would flow in to dispute their financial mastery; new leaders would arise to assail their political dominion. And against the prospect of all this they had initiated a secret warfare, endeavoring by stealth to ruin the irrigation company at the beginning, and nip the danger in the bud.

Now, it had been revealed all at once, that they had, not only a general and impersonal enemy in the form of the company, but a specific one in the form of a man, its manager. Out of nowhere he had emerged; out of thirty years' silence a sinister figure, who tapped with significant finger the book of their secret past, while his eyes steadfastly demanded a reckoning. Did he know all, or nothing? Knowing, did he deliberately leave them in doubt to shatter their confidence?

At least one of the four had been badly shaken on learning Weir's identity, and all now were uneasy. It was as if Fate, after a long wait, finally was about to open the sealed record.

"Perhaps you were just imagining things, Senator," Sorenson was saying.

Gordon moistened his lips and tugged nervously at his gray mustache.

"No, no!" he exclaimed. "Just ask Vorse. The man said his name was Weir, and that he was the son of Joe Weir. Then —then—"

"Well?" Sorenson demanded, frowning at the other's visible trepidation.

"He added: 'And I know what happened thirty years ago in this selfsame room.' Those were his very words. Isn't that true, Vorse?"

"Yes."

"They could mean only one thing."

"When the Senator went out Weir said to me," Vorse stated, "'That was for you, too.' I had my hand on my gun under the counter as he said it, ready if he made a move. He knew what I had there, but it didn't freeze him. He's a better man than Joe ever was, I want to remark, and different; he has nerve and a bad eye. He knows something; lay your bets on that."

"How much? How much? If we only knew that!" Senator Gordon vouchsafed testily.

"How would he know anything? Joe Weir didn't know, so how can this fellow know? Don't get scared at a shadow." It was the bearded, rough-tongued Burkhardt who spoke, concluding his words with an oath.

"There's the Mexican who saw—and that boy who looked in at the back door," Gordon asserted. "We just caught sight of him, and couldn't make out his face against the light. Then he had skipped when we ran there. We never did learn who he was."

"Do you think he remembers?" Sorenson said scornfully. "He may be dead. He may be on the other side of the world. Just some kid who happened to drift by at the minute and look in; and there's not one chance in a million he's anywhere around these parts yet. He would have blabbed long ago to some one if he had been. Don't figure him in, he's lost."

"Suarez isn't, though."

At this Vorse put in a word:

"He saw more than one killing in those days when he was roustabout for me. It was only one more to him. Probably has forgotten it. Anyway," Vorse ended with deadly emphasis, "he knows what would happen to him yet if he remembered it and talked. Leave him out of the calculation, too."

"Then that just makes the four of us," said Burkhardt. "Nobody else. So this fellow Weir doesn't know a thing."

"But we can't be absolutely sure," Gordon replied.

"Well, he'd need proof, wouldn't he?"

"Certainly, to bring an action. But how do we know he hasn't even that? Look all around the question as a lawyer does; let us assume the millionth chance, for instance. Suppose that he somewhere met and became acquainted with that boy. Suppose that he learned the latter had been here at the time and seen the shooting, and heard his story. Suppose that Weir knows this instant where he is, and can produce him as a witness in court."

"I reckon in this county his testimony wouldn't count for much," the ex-sheriff stated with a harsh laugh.

Sorenson, however, was impressed by

Gordon's reasoning, for he drummed with his fingers on the desk and sat in brooding silence. So likewise sat Vorse, who had heard Weir's utterance and beheld his face.

"He knows something," he repeated in a convinced tone. "Or he's a damned good bluffer."

"I passed him here at the door this afternoon," the banker remarked. "I turned to look at him, guessing who he was; and he had stopped and was looking at me. Cool about it, too. We'll have to watch him."

"Perhaps if we just tip him off to keep his mouth shut tight that will be enough," Burkhardt suggested. "If he knows the four of us are ready—"

Vorse sniffed.

"You think he can be bluffed?" he said. "You haven't seen him yet; go take a look. We'll not throw any scare into him. If he was that kind, he wouldn't have told us who he is. He wanted us to know he's after us, that's my opinion. He wants to shake our nerve—and he shook the Senator's all right that day at the bar."

"He did," Gordon admitted. "The thing was so infernally unexpected. Almost like Joe Weir himself appearing. I didn't sleep a wink that night, what with my heart being bad and what with seeing him."

"Suppose he has proofs?" Vorse asked after a pause, while his narrowed eyes moved from one to another of his companions.

A considerable silence followed. The question jerked into full light the issue that had all the while been lurking in the recesses of their minds—an issue full of ghastly possibilities. Gordon's fingers trembled as he wiped with his handkerchief the cold sweat on his brow.

"We're all in it," Vorse added.

Burkhardt brought his fist down on the desk with a sudden crash.

"If he has proofs, then it's him or us!" he exclaimed, while the blood suffused his face. "Him or us—and that means him! I'll never go behind bars!"

"Sure not. None of us," Vorse said.

"It will mean—" Gordon began in an agitated voice, but did not finish.

Sorenson gave a nod of his head. His mouth was compressed determinedly.

"Exactly. He'll never use his proofs. We're in too far to halt now, if matters come to the point of his trying to use them. He has a grip on us in one way; he knows we can't declare his father, Joe Weir, did the killing; that would make us—what do you call it, Senator?"

"Accomplices after the fact. Besides, it would then come out that we had taken over and shared among us his stuff—fifty thousand apiece. It's a deplorable situation we're in, gentlemen; deplorable. If we were but able to start the story Joe Weir believed and fled because of, it would cut the ground out from under this man's feet at once."

"It's him we'll cut, not the ground under him," Burkhardt growled, thrusting his hairy chin forward toward the lawyer. "And cut his damned throat."

"I hate to think of our being forced to—to homicide; even justifiable homicide."

"Homicide nothing! It's just killing a rattlesnake waiting in the brush to strike. That's the way we used to do in the old days; and if he's going to bring them back, that's what we'll do again."

Sorenson smiled grimly.

"We'll wait till we're sure he has the proofs, then—"

"Then we'll act quick and sure," Vorse shot out.

"And quietly," the cattleman added. "We'll take no more chances this time. It will be arranged carefully beforehand; all four of us will be in it, of course—equal responsibility—and there'll be no witnesses."

Senator Gordon's face wore a pallid, sickish look.

"I hope to God there's some other way out of it," he muttered.

"So do all of us," Burkhardt snarled. "But if there isn't, it means guns—for you, along with the rest of us."

The big cattleman leaned forward and gazed from under his heavy brows, compelling Gordon to meet his fixed look.

"You were keen enough at the time for your share of Joe Weir's stuff, and to get rid of him as a Legislative candidate, knowing he would probably beat you," he said. "So you'll play the hand out to the end

now, the bad cards as well as the good. You're no better than the rest of us, and it was you who hatched the scheme for cleaning him up, and put over the story."

"I know, I know. But—but this would be too much like cold-blooded murder."

"Murder!" Sorenson grated. "Did you look straight into this fellow Weir's eyes? Didn't you see something there that resembled murder? He'd like only the chance to kill us one by one with his own hands. I saw that much. Just as Burkhardt said, it's him or us. After you told me about him, I had only to take one look.

"If he has the goods on us—well, he'll have to die. Make up your mind to that. We're back to the time of thirty years ago, and fighting for our lives. We're not only all in on the Weir job, but the Dent killing—all of us. If the facts become known, we'll be run into some other county and court and hung. And every enemy we've made in these years past will put up his head and clamor for our blood. Let that sink into your mind."

The effect of this low, fierce utterance was to hammer the truth home. Gordon was ashen. Vorse's face appeared like an evil mask. Burkhardt glowered savagely.

At that instant there sounded the faint report of a shot from the street. Then, as the group sat unmoving, rigid, keyed to the highest pitch of expectancy, there followed quickly two more shots. Afterward, a hush.

"A gun-play!" issued from Vorse's lips softly.

They all sprang up to hurry to the door.

CHAPTER VI.

A SHOT IN THE DARK.

STEELE WEIR, driving his car down the street in the dusk, had caught sight of Felipe Martinez standing near Sorenson's office. He stopped close by; beckoned. Martinez would do as well as another.

"You're a notary, I suppose?" he questioned.

"Yes, Mr. Weir. Most of us lawyers here are," he replied politely, when he had advanced.

"I've some papers here I want acknowledged to-night. Must get them into the mail going down to Bowenville in the morning."

"Only too pleased to facilitate your business, Mr. Weir. My office is down a few doors."

"Jump in."

"It's but a few steps."

"Then I'll get out here." And the engineer stopped the engine and descended to the ground.

Along the street open doorways and windows were already beginning to make yellow panels of lamplight in the thin gloom. The air was still warm, balmy, scented by the lingering aroma of the greasewood smoke of supper fires in Mexican ovens. Stars were jeweling the sky. Few persons moved in the twilight.

One of these was a man who, standing at the door of a native saloon across the street and a little farther up, had come diagonally over toward the spot on seeing the engineer halt his car. He walked with a slouching haste seldom exhibited by a Mexican, and gained the place as Weir stepped out. There he slackened his pace while he scanned the American with an intense, slow gaze that the engineer, chancing to raise his eyes, squarely met.

Mexicans always looked at him and fell silent when he passed since he had shown who was master at the dam. In the eyes of some was merely stupid curiosity, in some a shrinking, and in many a half-veiled hostility. That did not trouble Weir. In Mexico he had dealt with recalcitrant workmen of more lawless nature than these. He usually ignored them altogether now, as they were no longer in his employ. But this man seized his attention.

It was not yet too dark to mark his face as he lounged past, slowly turning his head about as he progressed until his chin was on his shoulder, staring back. His look while remained riveted on Weir—a steady, contemplative, evil regard. In Chihuahua the engineer had once seen a notorious local "killer" who had that same gaze.

Martinez also had glanced at the fellow.

"Who is that man? One of the discharged workmen?" Weir asked him, when,

moving forward, they in turn had passed the Mexican.

"No, I imagine not. At any rate, he doesn't belong in San Mateo or anywhere about. I know everybody for fifty miles, for I've been active in social and political affairs. He's unknown to me. A stranger." Then, a little farther along: "Here is my office, Mr. Weir. I'll have a light in an instant. Ah, now. Be so good as to have a chair, and we'll expedite your business."

As Martinez filled out the acknowledgment blanks on the papers, his eyes furtively skipped over the vital portions of the documents. The latter were connected with company business. He had hoped they would be personal so that he might learn something more of this manager's affairs, possibly more of his secret antagonism for Sorenson and his friends.

Any intrigue appealed to the thin, slippery lawyer's soul; but most of all, some one else's intrigue, into which he might profitably put a finger. However, from these papers he was to learn nothing.

He had considered all possibilities of the affair, all possible solutions of what might have occurred between Joseph Weir, undoubtedly the father of the man sitting across the table from him, and the four men now conferring in Sorenson's office. This was no petty squabble, he divined. There was something going on under the surface that was big—big! And very dangerous, too, for that moment in Vorse's bar was not to be mistaken; it had been tense, electric. Utmost caution on his part would be necessary.

As between the two parties, his sympathies at present inclined toward Weir. The refusal on the latter's part to reemploy the Mexican workmen on their own terms was purely a matter of policy, and the lawyer's first gusty anger had long been forgotten.

But not so Sorenson's sneering words that afternoon. They struck to the heart of his vanity, breeding an animosity that would last. Had not the cattleman stated that he should hold no political office whatever? After all his services, too? Had he not definitely shown Martinez might never expect anything there?

Well, the lawyer wasn't one tamely to yield his rights; he did not purpose always to remain a scrimping, pettifogging attorney, existing on crumbs.

When, with a flourish, he had appended his name to the acknowledgments and affixed his seal, he sat back, thoughtfully studying the engineer, who was carefully examining the paragraphs for errors. He knew his business, Martinez; the man would find no mistakes. The lawyer's eyes suddenly glistened. He arose and closed the door as Weir thrust the documents into a stout linen envelope, addressed and stamped.

"I'll be pleased to see that your letter goes to the mail in the morning," he said, returning to his place. "The stage leaves at eight-thirty."

"Post-office is closed now, I suppose. Very well. It will be an accommodation," the engineer responded.

Martinez leaned forward.

"If you can spare the time, I should like to have a little talk with you. Pardon me if I appear presumptuous, but, as you are aware, Mr. Weir, I overheard your words to Senator Gordon in Vorse's saloon. I inferred—check me at any instant if you consider this none of my business—that there exists some unpleasant feeling between you two gentlemen, and possibly others.

"Senator Gordon has always handled the company's business in his private capacity of agent. As you know, he's a silent partner in many enterprises with Sorenson, Vorse, and a man named Burkhardt. They run this town and county. You should know, if you already don't, that they're secretly opposed to your irrigation project, whatever they profess. They've misled the people into believing it will work an injury to the district, whereas it will be beneficial. Unfortunately, too, they lead the people by the noses—but not me! I refuse to be subservient."

He paused to note the effect of his words.

"Now, Mr. Weir, these are facts you can confirm if you are not already acquainted with them, which I think you are. Because I'm independent in my opinions and actions I stand in disfavor with these gentlemen, which may or may not be an objec-

tion in your view to what I have in mind. And this is it:

"I should be pleased to execute any legal work that you care to give me; it might be of advantage to your company to have at times a representative other than Gordon, who is not even a lawyer, only a politician, who is aligned against you, and will serve his own interest first. He's in a position to cause you embarrassment."

"Our Eastern attorneys draw all documents."

"Of course. But I was thinking of delays more than anything else. There are a thousand ways a lawyer can push or halt matters at will, and your project will never be free from legal red tape until completed—if then. I'm not unselfish in this, I admit; the business would be valuable to me. But aside from that, I'd give you this advice, anyway—secure another agent, in any case; one without antagonistic personal interests, if you can find another in San Mateo besides me. See, I'm frank! That may sound egotistical, but really I'm the only free man among lawyers. And I've paid for my liberty!"

He made a sweeping gesture to indicate his shabby office.

"If I had taken orders, I could have been county attorney and probably a judge. But I respect myself too much to take orders from Sorenson and his bunch. I choose this sort of thing in preference."

Steele Weir maintained a non-committal silence. Again the thin, dark-skinned lawyer swiftly weighed the man before him; considered the dangers in which he might become involved if he went a step farther, recoiled, then grew bolder.

Sorenson had marked him for poverty and nonentity; under the favoring shelter of the irrigation company's power he might arise from both. For at moments the acute Mexican sensed the inevitable victory of the new forces at work; this, one of the last strongholds of old-time cattle and sheep interests, would break down, yield to plow and fence.

"Now, there's something more, though I hesitate to mention it," he went on doubtfully. "While Sorenson and his crowd run things, it's not because the people—and

that means us Mexicans chiefly—love them. We're indolent by nature; we idle rather than work; borrow when we can rather than earn—I speak of our race, but we're learning that work proves best in the long run.

"Those men have squeezed my people, and robbed them, and kept them down. Nothing more would I wish than to see them deposed. It's no secret they've built their wealth by questionable methods, but who can prove it?

"Do you know what I suspect? You have something on Sorenson's crowd. That's why they're uneasy; that's why the four are sitting over in Sorenson's office this minute with their heads together, meeting the minute the cattleman arrives home. I saw them go in.

"Leaving aside the question of your own affairs, I'd like to see matters changed here in this county so that every man had a fair chance. Anything that will bring that about enlists my interest. When I heard your statement to Gordon, and saw his face, I knew there was something in the past that alarmed him. I recalled a name I had once run across when abstracting a title—"

It was not this ingenious twisting of the truth that caused the lawyer to become filled with sudden dismay and stop, but the hardening of the engineer's face.

"Go on!" Weir commanded.

"Well, the name was Joseph Weir. I looked it up again, to be sure, and found the property had been deeded to Sorenson, who still has it. I wondered—"

"What did you wonder?" came with a devouring look.

"If—if Joseph Weir received consideration according to law." Martinez's courage flowed back again. "I'll make no attempt to justify my curiosity, sir, except to say that more than one man in the Southwest was done out of property in early days; and the practise has not ceased, for that matter. But now the means are usually legal, and Mexicans the victims. Sharp mortgage dealings, and so forth. Now, if I've said too much, I'll instantly forget all about it. On the other hand—"

"Well?"

"I might be of assistance. If you wish to look into that old transaction, that is.

If there was anything crooked about the deal—and I set it down that there was, with Sorenson mixed in, and with Vorse and Burkhardt the witnesses named in the deed, and Gordon as notary, taking the acknowledgment of Joseph Weir's signature, as the record shows—then there should be some weak spot that could be attacked.

"There may be men yet alive conversant with the circumstances; they may know whether duress or fraud was exercised, supposing the sale was not honest. Some of the old Mexicans may remember Weir, and could give a clue; they have good memories for things of those days. Of course, if the transaction was all right, then I'm all wrong in my suppositions."

Weir arose.

"I can give you some of the company's business; perhaps considerable of it," he said.

Martinez sprang up, an expression of gratitude upon his face. He had not realized all that he had hoped for, but he was nevertheless delighted.

"I'm really sincere when I give you a thousand thanks, Mr. Weir," said he, spreading his arms wide. "I'll not make promises as to the efficiency of my services; let results speak for themselves."

"I always do," was the comment. "But I'll tell you what I demand in any one associated with me—absolute trustworthiness first of all; then loyalty and ability."

"Which leaves nothing," Martinez smiled.

He preceded the engineer and swung the door open, stepping aside. To the visitor's question regarding fees for the acknowledgments taken, he waved a declining hand.

"Nothing, nothing. Delighted to render you the service."

"Very well."

"I'll attend to the letter," the lawyer again assured him.

"Come out to the dam in a day or two."

"To-morrow if you wish."

"To-morrow afternoon will do."

Steele Weir's frame filled the lighted doorway as he stepped forth from the office. He paused to accustom his eyes to the darkness, for during his colloquy with the attorney full night had descended. On the

same side of the street with himself, and perhaps twelve or fifteen paces off, he saw a girl's figure appear before a window and disappear as she moved along.

Then suddenly a tongue of red flame darted at him across the street, where lay a space of unlighted gloom. His hat was whipped off his head. The sharp report of a shot cracked between the adobe walls.¹

With an unbelievably rapid movement Steele Weir drew from his pocket the gun which he had carried ever since his encounter with young Sorenson in the restaurant, fired twice where he had seen the flame, and leaped aside into the darkness beside the doorway. There he waited, half crouching, for a further attack.

But none came. Men began to run toward the place. Shouts and calls echoed along the street. In two minutes a crowd was surging before Martinez's door, wildly asking questions.

Weir pocketed his pistol and walked back into the office, where he found his bullet-pierced hat lying on the floor and the attorney standing frozen with astonishment. A stream of people followed at his heels.

"Who did this shooting? Do you know, Felipe?" a tall, raw-boned white man, who led them, asked hastily.

"This gentleman, Mr. Weir, was fired on, sheriff," Martinez burst out volubly.

"And I fired in return," the engineer stated. "The fellow was across the street in the dark. You might look over there."

Turning and pushing his way through the packed door, the sheriff disappeared. The crowd melted away again. Presently, as Weir glanced about, he saw a new figure at the doorway, staring at him. He went toward the girl outlined in the lamplight.

"Was that you I saw moving along just before the exchange of compliments, Miss Hosmer?" he asked.

"Yes. I was coming toward you, on my way home."

"It probably gave you a fright."

"It did, indeed. I heard the shot and saw your hat knocked off. I just went cold in my tracks. At first I believed you were killed."

"I'm very much alive, as you see."

"But it was dreadful! Who would fire

at you from the dark? Some one tried to murder you!"

"It looks like it. Still, here I am, ready to move your car out of the water next time it's stalled."

She entered the room slowly.

"Who in San Mateo would do such a terrible thing, Mr. Martinez?" she addressed the lawyer. The pallor was still on her face and her eyes large with horror.

"Ah, Miss Janet, if we but knew, we'd lay hands on him and send him to the penitentiary."

Real emotion struggled in the lawyer's words. With the return of his senses he had just begun to realize by what a narrow margin had the assassin's bullet missed destroying his future client and prospects.

A growing murmur across the street attracted their attention. Then, as they continued to chat of the event, the sheriff reappeared, directing half a dozen men, who laid a burden in the light of Martinez's doorway.

"You got him," he said to Weir with ominous significance. "One bullet through the head, one through his stomach. He's good and dead."

Weir walked forward and inspected the outstretched figure. It was the man whose gaze had been so malevolently fastened upon him as he joined Martinez before the bank.

"Who is he?" he asked.

"A strange Mexican. Some of these men say he showed up this morning and hung around the saloons, not talking much. Didn't you ever see him before?" The question expressed a perplexed curiosity.

"Once. When Martinez and I were coming here to transact some business. He was taking a good look at me then when he passed us. That wasn't over half an hour ago. Never saw him before that."

"He shot at you first?"

"I had just stepped out of this room. Could I see him hiding over there? Or know he was there?" Then he added: "I was taken by surprise, but I saw the flash of his gun."

The sheriff, Madden by name, looked at Weir appreciatively.

"You can use one yourself," said he.

Martinez now repeated the fact of the dead man having fired the first shot, which Janet Hosmer confirmed.

"Well, is there anything more?" Weir questioned.

"Not to-night, I reckon," Madden replied. "We'll have an inquest in the morning. Show up then. Where will I find your father, Miss Hosmer?"

"At home." Then to the engineer she explained: "Father acts in the absence of the coroner, who's away just now."

"I'm very sorry this happened, on your account," said he.

"And I'm very glad you were not hurt."

Outside, the corpse was being borne away, followed by the crowd of Mexicans.

"You're still shaken by the thing. It's enough to upset any girl. Let me walk home with you, or you may be starting at shadows all the way."

CHAPTER VII.

JANET HOSMER.

ASILVERY brightness shone in the east as they came out of Martinez's office that increased as they went forward until all at once the moon arose into view, lighting the street, disclosing the flanking lines of squat buildings, revealing the tall cottonwoods about the court-house and elsewhere thrust up in the town.

Janet Hosmer breathed a sigh of relief. The darkness had seemed potent for further evil, but now it was as if the latter retreated with the shadows. She felt a desire to go on alone, to separate herself from this companion with whom chance had brought her in contact at a dramatic moment, to get away from the whole terrible affair.

Involuntarily her spirit shrank at the nearness of the man, for though he had struck back in self-defense, he nevertheless had killed another, and the act somehow appeared to set him apart from ordinary men, isolate him, give him the character of an Ishmael.

Yet her feelings were confused. Against this inclination was an avid curiosity, or rather a wonderment, as to what must now be occurring in his soul.

Her eyes sought his face as he walked beside her. Neither had spoken; and his countenance wore the same stern, contained aspect, calm, forceful, as the first time she had ever observed it.

But what was below the surface? What were the thoughts now revolving in his mind, and the emotions flowing in his breast? She could read nothing on that composed mask of a face. Was it possible for a man to slay another human being, even justifiably, without suffering a hurricane of the spirit?

But perhaps he had killed men before. The fact of his carrying a weapon and his swift, deadly fire pointed ominously to previous experience.

"Did you ever shoot any one before?" popped from between her lips. Then she stopped, clapping her hand over her mouth in consternation, and staring at him palely.

Weir had halted, too. He regarded her in silence for a little, a slight smile resting on his face. They stood before the bank, and his look went past her once to embrace the small, darkened building.

"I'm not a murderer by trade, if that's what you mean," said he, at last. "But I've killed a man or two before, yes." Then, at the white anguish of her lips and cheeks, his tone softened a degree as he went on: "Unfortunately, since becoming of age, I've had to fight. If not men, then the earth. If not the earth, then men. Sometimes both together. You saw what happened to-night; that fellow was unknown to me. He was not a workman who had been discharged and felt he had a grievance—"

"Oh, no!" she interjected. "The Mexicans here wouldn't attempt to murder you, however angry they might feel."

"I'm not so sure of that," he answered.

"But I am; I know them, I've lived among them!"

"Well, let that go. The man tried to kill me, at any rate. However, he was merely a tool, hired for the business by some one else. Ordinarily I don't discuss my affairs with any one, but since you've raised the matter I'll just say that I've enemies in San Mateo, who are anxious to dispose of me."

"Enemies here!"

"Yes. Who would be delighted to see me lie where that dead man lies, and are apparently determined to effect it?" He touched her sleeve with a finger. "But you will speak of this to no one."

"No, oh, no! Not a word!"

Steele gazed at her steadily. He already repented disclosing even so little of his private concerns, an impulse altogether at variance with his close-mouthed habit, but he had for some vague reason felt it necessary to explain his course, to justify himself, to this clear-eyed, fine-spirited girl. He could not let her rest under a misapprehension that he was a brute who reveled in blood-spilling. And as he regarded her, a conviction that she was absolutely to be trusted settled firmly into his mind.

She would be stanch; oxen and ropes could not drag information from her once she had determined not to speak. Yes, she would be loyal to her given word—and to her friends. Weir's eyes glanced at the diamond on her finger. It would be a girl like her with whom he would have chosen to mate if fate had not directed his feet on a road which seemingly left him no choice but incessant and solitary struggle.

"I hate it all; I have nothing but crusts and nettles!" he exclaimed, with sudden, fierce passion. And with a quick movement of his hand he beckoned her on.

Submissively she accompanied him, her bosom rising and falling with a quickened rhythm. Too much had happened, one thing piling on another, for her to sort her thoughts or to attempt to understand things yet; and in her tossing state of mind she went at his gesture as one follows a guide, or as a simple matter of course.

In her mental turmoil that last passionate utterance of the man's played like a lambent flame. Tense, violent, spontaneous, it had come from the heart. What harsh lot he had lived and sufferings borne she could not even guess; but no man spoke with such unconscious bitterness who had not undergone pain and travail of spirit.

His head was now turned a little toward her as they walked: she perceived him staring at the moonlit street, his lips compressed, his brows knit.

Then he glanced about at her, his face clearing.

"Pay no attention to what I said," he remarked. "I shouldn't have let loose that way. Hello, what's on now?"

Before them, and in front of the courthouse, was a packed crowd, people who had run forth at the sound of shots, augmented by those who had since arrived upon the scene. It was motionless.

"Stand back, stand back; don't trample the body!" came Sheriff Madden's voice in an angry order.

The crowd surged a little apart in the center.

"How do you know this dead man fired the first shot?" asked some one, vehemently.

The voices went lower, so that Steele Weir and Janet Hosmer, who had paused at the edge of the throng, were able only to catch the tones:

"Who was that that questioned the sheriff?" Weir whispered.

"Mr. Burkhardt, I think. Sounded like him."

So intent were the Mexicans upon the occurrence in their midst that those close by remained with backs toward the pair, failing to notice their presence. All craned eagerly to miss nothing of the controversy.

"How do you know this engineer didn't start it?" came Burkhardt's voice again.

"Don't be a fool; there were witnesses."

"I'd like to talk to those witnesses. I doubt if they really saw anything. It looks to me as if there's another side to this shooting."

"Well, of course you know—you, sitting there in the bank, as you say," was the ironical retort.

At this juncture another voice interposed.

"Madden, we want no mistake here. This Weir doesn't bear a very good reputation for peacefulness, from what I've learned. If this Mexican has simply been shot down—"

"Who is that?" Steele demanded of the girl. "I can't see him."

"That"—Janet Hosmer's speech faltered—"that is Mr. Sorenson. Oh, they misunderstand! Let me push in there and tell them how it happened."

The engineer's hand closed on her arm.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," he commanded, low.

"But—"

"No. Remain quiet and listen."

Her eyes flew up to his at this extraordinary course, so injurious to his own interests. She was anxious to press to the front and declare his innocence in the affair of everything but defending his life from an assassin. She could not understand why he also was not eager to spring forward, why he restrained her. Then she saw the implacable hatred on his face.

A thrill quivered through her body. The feeling she had at that instant was one of being on the point of seeing behind the curtain of a mystery, of making a discovery so sinister that she would gasp. Her very finger almost rested upon it.

Why were Mr. Sorenson and Mr. Burkhardt talking as they were? Trying by innuendo to make it seem her companion might have been guilty of a crime? Could it be— Her blood slowly congealed to ice at the horror of where her reasoning led.

Could it be they were the enemies he meant!

Such a thing was too dreadful, too absurd. They, the respected leaders of the community could never put a pistol in the dead wretch's hand to slay this man beside her. Mr. Sorenson! The father of Ed, whom— She stared blankly at her ring.

Yet the cattleman's heavy, smooth words continued to assail her ears steadily. She grasped their import once more.

"For the story is too thin. No man could hit another man across the street in the dark as this engineer claims, not only once but twice put a bullet where it would kill. Probably the dead man had something on this Weir, and the latter knew it. It's not impossible he found the fellow in his path, drew and murdered him at once, quickly put a hole in his own hat and then carried the body across the way, running back to Martinez's office. The thing could have been done in a minute. Martinez himself wouldn't have seen how it was worked. I'm not saying that was exactly how it was done, or that this Weir did actually murder him, but — investigate, Madden, investigate."

Steele Weir felt an angry tug at his sleeve. He looked around and beheld Janet Hosmer's eyes distended with incredulity.

"Come away, come away," she whispered. "I should never have believed it if I hadn't heard with my own ears!"

Keeping close to the line of buildings, they skirted the crowd, still unnoticed, and left it behind. She walked with quick, nervous steps; her hand yet unconsciously grasped his coat sleeve. All the way to her house, which they found dark, since a messenger had called the doctor to the court-house and the Mexican servant girl also was gone, she said nothing.

"Come up on the veranda; I want to talk," she announced when he opened the gate.

"Wouldn't it be best if you took your mind off the whole thing, by a book or something else? I'll go."

"As if I could take my mind off! There are matters in this I must know. You may wonder when I say it, Mr. Weir, but this happening concerns me more than you dream." Her dark, glowing gaze brooded on him with a sort of intense determination. Then she went on, "It—it involves my whole future as well as your own, though in a different way. So come inside, if you please."

Weir in silence accompanied her upon the dark, broad, vine-clad porch. In the half-gloom he found chairs for them.

"I'm going to the point at once," she declared. "Why did Mr. Sorenson talk in such a fashion?" And he could feel her bending forward as if hanging on his answer.

"That's the one thing I can't discuss," said he.

"I must know, I must know."

"And unhappily I must refuse."

"Oh, Mr. Weir, if you could but understand what this involves for me, you wouldn't hesitate! I was shocked at the shooting, but I saw its necessity on your part; you're not one to run from a foe, a cowardly foe least of all. But what I heard there in the street horrified me. I couldn't believe it; I can scarcely credit my ears yet. Mr. Sorenson and Mr. Burkhardt were not near when you were attacked; they

are not acquainted with the circumstances or facts as you, Mr. Martinez, and I know them; they apparently didn't appear until the crowd started away with the dead man. Yet at once—"

"Aye, at once," Steele Weir let slip.

"At once, immediately, when they had barely heard the story, they began to tear it to pieces and suggest another, making you out a villain. You're only an acquaintance, sir, scarcely more than a stranger, but as I listened it outraged my sense of justice. Mr. Sorenson, of all men! My brain was in a whirl. But it's steady now."

The engineer failed to open his lips at her pause.

"I'm no fool, Mr. Weir; I think of other things besides dressing my hair and using a powder puff. I can sometimes put two and two together—when I see the 'twos' clearly. Now, tell me why Mr. Sorenson talked as he did, for I must have my eyes clear."

"Ask me anything but that, Miss Hosmer."

He sat distressed and uneasy at her prolonged muteness. Suddenly she questioned quietly:

"Are those two men the enemies you spoke of?"

"It will save me embarrassment if I go," he remarked, starting to rise. "I don't want you to hate me, you know, and yet I can't say anything."

Her grasp pulled him imperatively back.

"You shall not go yet."

"Then I can only continue to decline making answers. I frankly say that I regret having uttered a word of explanation."

"I don't regret it. And I intend to keep questioning you, however rude you may think me. I must know," she cried impetuously, "and I shall know! Mr. Sorenson is one of the men you referred to, or he would never seek to direct suspicion at you. I saw the look on your face, sir, as he spoke. But why should you two be enemies? You come here, a stranger, to San Mateo. Or have you been here before some time? Did you know him before?"

Again he could feel her eyes straining at him.

"It seems mad to think of him and Mr. Burkhardt, and perhaps others, hiring some

one to shoot you down from a dark doorway. It is utterly mad—crazy. But why should they want to convict you, in the crowd's opinion at least, of murdering the man? It would not be just trouble about the dam—oh, no. I can't see through it at all. Why won't you tell me? You can trust me—and I want to help you as well as help myself. You certainly don't hold against me my silly nonsense and unkind words of the day you brought me home from the ford."

"I didn't think them silly; they delighted me," he responded. "I hadn't had any ~~bad~~ happen to me so refreshing in years."

"We must be friends. Something tells me they're going to make you trouble over this shooting, and you'll need friends."

"Something tells me you're right in both respects," he laughed.

"And friends must stick together."

"That's what they should do."

In the dusk of the vine-clad, flower-scented place where they sat he experienced the subtle power of this intimacy. Not a soul stirred in the empty, moonlit street before the house. No sounds disturbed the warm peace of the night. Only there ran in this secluded spot the murmur of their voices.

"I could never stand by and see any man unjustly accused and defamed if I knew he was innocent, without lifting up my voice in defense," she proceeded. "But let me ask if on your side you're treating me fairly?"

Weir could have groaned.

"You have a noble spirit, Miss Hosmer. You're more courageous and kind than any girl I've ever known. Would you have me reveal what my best judgment tells me should remain untold?"

"But what of me? Would you keep it to yourself if my future happiness might turn on it?"

The appeal in her words shook Steele's heart.

"How does this business affect your happiness? How?" he asked, in perplexity.

Now it was her turn to hesitate. Why should she pause, indeed, before telling to this man what every one else knew? Yet

hesitate she did, from a feeling she could but partly analyze. Of her *fiancé* she had already had disturbing secret doubts that had increased of late: doubts of his habits, his character, and the worthiness of his love; so that it was with a little eddy of dissatisfaction and shame that she admitted the relationship. More, she questioned her own love as an actual thing.

In a startling way, too, this silent, forceful man, so deadly in earnest and so earnestly deadly, so terrible in some aspects, seemed at the instant to dwarf the other in stature and power as if the latter were a plump manikin.

Perhaps at the last minute she had a shiver of dread at what might issue from the engineer's lips in the way of facts if he took her at her word and told her what she had demanded to know. Did she want to know? Suppose she let the affair rest where

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

it was and went forward to the future in the comfortable assurance of ignorance.

In that case, that might be wooing revelations that then could not be escaped, like consuming lightnings. She would settle it now once for all.

"It does concern my future and my happiness, vitally," she declared, earnestly.

"For this reason—"

"Yes?"

"I'm engaged to marry Ed Sorenson, son of Mr. Sorenson."

Weir leaped to his feet.

"Good God! That fellow!" he exclaimed, astounded.

Without another word he sprang down the steps and strode away. Janet Hosmer, grasping the arms of her chair and staring after him, saw him once bring down his clenched fist on nothing. Then he passed rapidly along the street and out of sight.

Mustered Out

by H. Bedford-Jones

I.

SERGEANT ALOYSIUS LARRIGAN inspected the houses ahead—and hesitated. Before he found name and wealth and fame in California film fields, Aloysius Larrigan had been born and raised in New York. Hence, he knew the metropolis. He knew that behind him on Fifth Avenue were the false jewels; and that here ahead of him was the real thing. Here, half a block off Fifth Avenue, was the house of Jim Bleeker, bunky of Sergeant Aloysius Larrigan.



But the sergeant hesitated, gripping the package a little harder in his hand. Then, mustering up courage, he approached the doorway and rang.

The outer door opened, and a stolid butler gazed at him.

"I—I've come to see Mrs. Bleeker," said the sergeant nervously.

"It's quite early, sir," answered the butler, somehow stifling his first instinct of blank rejection. "I hardly think, sir, that Mrs. Bleeker is—"

"Look here!" snapped Larrigan, flushing. "I've just landed from France. My

name is Larrigan. Jim Bleeker was my bunky—”

“ If you'll step inside, sir,” hastened the butler, changing countenance abruptly. “ I'm sure that Mrs. Bleeker will wish to see you.”

Aloysius Larrigan sat himself down between a mounted piece of fifteenth-century armor and a dull-gleaming Rubens. All this, he knew, was the real thing. He had guessed that Jim Bleeker was an aristocrat, but—well, all this was a bit crushing. Before he quite realized it, Mrs. Bleeker, in her widow's black, was upon him and holding his hand.

“ Jim wrote me so much of you!” she was saying quietly. “ I'm very, very glad to know you, Mr. Larrigan. I received your letter from Bordeaux, telling me of the final days—I cannot tell you how I appreciated the sweetness of that letter.”

Aloysius Larrigan blushed fearfully. He stammered something and fell silent.

“ You must stay for luncheon—but how long shall you have in the city?”

“ No time at all, ma'am,” returned Aloysius. He displayed his package. “ We're going through town to be mustered out, and then I have to hit for California. I've got important business there, you see—a lady I've not seen for a year, and also business. I just got permission to run up here with this.”

He thrust forward the package, all his carefully rehearsed speech and actions gone to the winds.

“ You see, Mrs. Bleeker, Jim made me promise to bring these things here myself. They are just the little things; well, you'll see. He thought maybe you would like to have them. I have to be back in half an hour.”

Mrs. Bleeker took the package, bit her lip very hard, and then threw back her shoulders and looked Aloysius Larrigan in the eye. He realized that hers was a peculiar bravery—the courage of deep things, of rare blood, of a sensitive, inner grief that was tearing her very soul before his eyes.

He felt tongue-tied and extremely uncomfortable, far different from the easy assurance habitual to him.

“ Wait just a minute, please,” she said, and left him.

He waited, gazing at the velvet hangings, the deep softness of everything around him, feeling himself frightfully out of place. The knowledge that he was an American soldier, and as good as any man alive, did not help him.

Then he smiled grimly, at thought of how little the studio directors knew about the furnishings of an aristocratic home! All the studio men knew about was the flashy emptiness of the newly rich and the professional decorator.

Mrs. Bleeker was before him again.

“ I'm more sorry than I can tell you, Mr. Larrigan, that you have to run away so quickly. When you get settled in California, will you please send me your address? One does not know what unforeseen emergencies may arise.”

Aloysius promised.

Mrs. Bleeker produced a little morocco case.

“ I would like you to have this,” she said quietly, very steadily. “ I brought it to Jim once; he always wore it. There's no other man I could give it to, Mr. Larrigan—but if you would accept it, you would give me great pleasure.”

Larrigan gazed at the scarf-pin, an abalone blister mounted in gold.

It came to him that this was a very precious tribute, a tribute from the woman's heart, meaning more than words could say.

Jim Bleeker had other friends, of course—wealthy friends, college friends, all that a man of his standing would have. But he, Larrigan, had been Bleeker's bunky in France, had watched Jim Bleeker die, had been more to Jim Bleeker than any man alive.

And this was a tribute, the most precious heart-gift he would ever know.

“ I—I'd be very glad,” he said, stumbling over the words, cursing himself because he could not express the thing that was in him, the feeling that gripped him in that moment of revelation. “ I'll be wearing cits in a couple of days. I—I sure appreciate this very deeply, Mrs. Bleeker.”

“ There's no other man I could give it to,” she said again very softly.

This was all. He was thankful that his face seemed quite unknown to her.

II.

REEVER KEENE was home again—Reever Keene, the great; Reever Keene, the man who had snapped asunder his fabulous contract a year ago in order to enlist as a private; Reever Keene, whose pictures were the greatest drawing-card in every theater of the country!

He had sent no notice of his coming, but the studio knew of it and was ready. As the Overland drew in, sixteen automobiles were waiting, and these automobiles were the cream of motion-picture motordom. All Los Angeles knew that the aluminum car with purple trimmings was Reever Keene's; that his director owned the pea-green Twin Duplex striped with canary; that his leading lady had paid eleven thousand dollars for the screaming blue-and-gold roadster, and so forth.

But a terrible thing happened at the station—a thing which, fortunately, was kept out of the papers by influence. As one of the lesser lights of filmdom grasped the hand of the great Keene he gave a raucous laugh.

"For Heaven's sake, Reever! Where'd you get the abalone sparkler? Wow! Look at it, folks; pipe the—"

Reever Keene's fist smashed him square in the mouth.

The press-agent wanted to use the story, of course; but Reever Keene took the press-agent by the nape of the neck and kicked him hard. Influence did the rest—advertising influence. The story was killed.

"I can't understand what's got into Keene," said the director, riding back to the studios with the president of the company. "And look at the face of him! We'll have to paint him an inch deep to disguise that brick-red tan and make him come out like the old screen idol! Fortunately his profile is all-right still."

The president grunted. He was a wise man, or he would not have been in his present position.

"Keene takes up his contract where he left off," he returned. "That's all I'm worrying about! Let Keene run the whole

damned place if he wants. If you'd gone into the army, my son, instead of sitting on your draft-proof job, the Lord knows you'd be a damned sight better director!"

The director looked at his leather puttees and said no more.

"Where's Lola?" asked Reever Keene, driving to the studios in his own car once more, his leading lady and chief supports gathered around him. "Thought she might be around?"

"She'll turn up at the studios," was the response. "Working on a location near Santa Monica to-day. They'll be back for dinner. We're having a real celebration, old boy!"

"Lola's awful proud of that sparkler you gave her," simpered the leading lady. "Heaven knows it was a beaut!"

Reever Keene shivered a little. He was not sure why he shivered; nor was he sure why the warmth and cordiality of his reception at the studio left him cold and hard.

He had not thought it would be this way. He had looked forward to falling right back into the old rut, among the old friends, and he had anticipated swaggering like a good one—all kinds of publicity in it! But, somehow, he found himself landing with a horrible jar. He was damned glad, he reflected, to be done with the bare simplicity of the soldier's life, with the saluting and uniforms and general prophylaxis; and yet—

Homesickness had glamourized all the old life, but now that he was back in it, the glamour seemed unaccountably like tinsel. The directors, for instance, even his own director and old crony, with their puttees and riding-breeches, general superiority, and bustling business—well, maybe it was the puttees that grated. Keene had saluted leather puttees until he was heartily sick of it; but that was another story altogether.

He wondered inwardly if he had ever been like the men now around him—good fellows, of course, but abominably artificial. These fancy tailored garments, these amber cigarette-holders and sodden cigarettes without a bite, these flashing jewels, and, worst of all, this breezy talk that moved in perpetual high lights—

What the devil was the matter with him, anyhow? Maybe it was because Lola had not come yet.

Well, Lola came, with a stifled shriek and a tiny Peke, and flung herself at him. Good Heaven! Keene had been away from studio paint so long that her appearance frightened him. And had he really picked that engagement ring, that diamond like a walnut? Yes. He remembered hideously the glee with which he had nonchalantly signed that five-thousand-dollar check, and the delight with which he had seen the check pictured in the papers.

"You've been away a hell of a long time, old sport!" and his director clapped him on the back. "But now you're back to the life—the only life, boy!"

"Right you are!" cried Reever Keene, bracing his shoulders. "Let's have a drink!"

III.

THE fact that Reever Keene, home from the army, insisted on working with an abalone blister in his scarf, was an idiosyncrasy good for three-day comment in the press. And the press-agent sighed for the lost opportunities that were closed to him simply by the stubborn deviltry of Keene. Nobody knew what had got into the screen star. He had changed. The abalone pin, for instance, was a sore subject with him.

He never wore any of his former loud attire, and had discarded all his jewelry, which formerly flashed in the cabaret lights of Los. He even wore that abalone pin stuck in the front of his dress shirt, for a society picture; and when the director expostulated, Keene bluntly told him to go to hell—which was no way to treat a famous director.

Then somebody in the scenario department—that is, somebody in the orange-hued-flivver class—had an inspiration. He wrote a story about that abalone pin. Keene, according to his contract, had the say about what film stories were to be accepted for his use; and he went into closed session with the scenario department, and there was evolved a scenario which made the director gasp. But the scenario went

through; it had to go through, with Keene backing it.

"What's come over him?" said the president to the director. "He used to get stories written by his friends, turn down everything from the department, make us pay five hundred dollars for the stories—and then split with his friends. That's the old stall. What's this new wrinkle?"

"Damned if I know," groaned the director. "It's got society stuff in it, and only last week he said he'd never touch society stuff again. And there ain't any punch, not a bit; it's one o' them bleedin'-heart things, and it ain't got—"

"It's got Reever Keene in it," snapped the president, "and that's enough to put it across anywhere. Do you get me?"

The director departed, weeping.

Worse was to come, however. Reever Keene sold his gorgeous car, and showed up with a plain green-black affair—not even a victoria top to it! Lola refused to ride in the wretched thing, and Keene swore; and the end of this matter was a fine quarrel which the press-agent featured without the least opposition.

And then came the first of the month and the new story.

The story was a society story, right enough. For three days the company was on location at the Billingkamp residence—you remember, of course, Billingkamp's Canned Soups—and the exteriors were gorgeous affairs.

The trouble was that Reever Keene had been reading some highbrow stuff, and insisted on wearing his silk hat without any of the rakish tilt which is so fetching to the screen folk; and he insisted on throwing out the beautiful white roadster with red upholstery which the director had provided, and used his own sobersides of a car—and other things like that.

In between times the quarrel with Lola was deftly adjusted, the date was set for the wedding, and duly featured by the press-agent.

After that the company came back to the studio, the remainder of the picture being interior sets—and then the trouble really began. Reever Keene had instructed the property-men about the drawing-

room set; the director had done likewise. Props, seeing himself between the devil and the deep sea, provided both sets, and left the principals to scrap it out. Which was wise.

Reever Keene took one look at the director's set, and ordered it off the stage. The director was inspecting Reever Keene's set, and Keene met him in the act.

"My Lord!" said the director. "I don't know anything about motion-pictures; I'm just a poor simp who's spent all his life in the game. Look—for the love of Heaven, look!"

"Get down to cases, you," growled Keene. "Never mind the high-art stuff now. Just be sensible and tell me what's wrong!"

The director swallowed hard and waved his hand at the set. It had been assembled with a good deal of trouble. There was an imitation Rubens; there was a real set of imitation armor that looked from the camera considerably like fifteenth century. The rest was deeply rich velvet and hangings.

"As man to man," said the director, "I'll put it to you, Keene. How do you think this dark stuff is going to take? All to the bad! It can't be done, man! You've got to have contrast. Now, can't you realize that this picture has got to show a society home? A real swell home. None of your junk, but stuff that spells *money*. They eat it, the people do!"

"If you knew the money we'd spent on this set," began the property-man plaintively. But Keene interrupted.

"What would you suggest, then?"

"Just what I ordered set up!" returned the director. "Statuary. A nude on the wall. Some o' this here lacquered Chinese furniture—we got Bent's whole store to draw on, and you know the best people ain't buying anything else but lacquered, which shows up like real money. Then that high-colored rug, and so forth. It'll be toned down fine in the film, Keene."

"Maybe so, maybe so," said Reever Keene.

"And then these here costumes. I been reading over your directions." The director tapped the papers in his hand, with growing

boldness. "I notice you got white neckties with evening clothes; you know's well as I do they don't make contrast. Then you got the society dames ordered to cut out the low-neck stuff— What the hell give you such a notion of society, anyhow? Don't you know they run around half naked? And no jewels. My Lord! If I was to run out such a picture the society papers would give me plain hell!"

"If you had ever read them at all," said Keene dryly, "you'd see they do that, anyhow."

A few minutes later the president sent for Reever Keene.

"Take a cigar, Reever," he said genially. "Now, we'll have to cut out this fussing between you and Bob, see? He's a damned good director; I'm not paying him twenty-five thousand dollars for nothing."

"Let him mind his own business, then," said Keene, a little white around the jaw. "I've got a good picture, and he's not to spoil it."

"Sure not," agreed the president affably. "But see here, now. He's contracted to put out your pictures, ain't he? All right. And he's got the say."

"In other words," said Keene slowly, "I'll have to stand for his directing in this picture, eh?"

"Sure. His contract is up in three months. If you want, I'll put you in charge of your own directing after that."

"Then stop work on this picture until he's out of it."

"Can't do it, Reever—we're a week behind on the next release, and it's got to be rushed. That's why I'm putting it up to you straight to work in with him now, and we'll work in with you later, see?"

Reever Keene nodded curtly.

"I'll try," he said. "But—I won't promise."

"The hell he won't!" laughed the president later, when he was recounting the conversation to the director. "Like the rest of them—throwing a big bluff so he can strut around the Screen Club and tell how he handed it to me! Well, that's one way of managing these here stars, believe me! This guy's getting more money than the

President of these here United States. Is he going to chuck his job?"

"Not him," said the director confidently. "Besides, he's under contract to us, and if he broke the contract—"

"He'd be finished, absolutely!" declared the president. "He's no fool!"

The president was playing both ends against the middle, which is a wise game—sometimes.

IV.

REEVER KEENE had been too long in the movie game, and was taking too much money out of it, to have any artistic temperament—that is, when he was on the lot. Movie folk have to keep their temperament out of business.

Still, when Keene saw what his director was doing to the abalone-pin story, and realized that he could not prevent its being done, he boiled with inward and suffocating rage. After three days he was so stifled with fury that he was ready for an outbreak.

He had put Jim Bleeker into that story, and when he saw how the director was handling Jim Bleeker, despite all protests, his fury became white-hot.

On the fourth morning he drove to the studio without opening his private mail. Once in his dressing-room, he glanced over the letters while he was making up; but, for him, that mail resolved itself into just one letter. He propped it in front of him and read it over again:

DEAR MR. LARRIGAN:

Within a few days I am leaving for Europe to take part in reconstruction work. I could not leave without writing you to express anew my very deep appreciation of all your thoughtful kindness to Jim. I know from his letters what your friendship meant to him, and I have learned from other comrades of your great devotion toward the end. Thanks seem but a little thing to offer; yet, believe me, my thanks and appreciation come from the soul.

I know nothing of your financial position or status in civil life, and I do not wish you to think that I am insulting so deep and pure a thing as your friendship with Jim. However, I am enclosing a card from my attorneys, who are fully instructed to honor it in any way. If you should ever be in need of advice or aid, it will give me great happiness

to know that you will make use of this card as though it had been handed you by your friend,

JIM BLEEKER.

"Bless her sweet heart," muttered Reever Keene, tearing the card across and tossing it into his waste-basket. He smiled a little, as he thought of his twenty thousand dollars in cash, buried where no one would ever detect it; and of the Kansas oil stock, held by a friend, which brought in itself a comfortable income. Everybody in the business thought that Reever Keene blew all he had, like every one else; but Aloysius Larrigan knew better.

He read the letter again, fingering the blister pearl in his scarf, and forgetting his make-up completely. Once more he was standing in that house, half a block off Fifth Avenue; once more he was living through that moment when Mrs. Bleeker had handed him that scarf-pin, with her quiet, steady voice, and her brave, stricken eyes.

The thought of it made him sit very quiet, staring at the letter. In all his life he had never experienced a moment such as that; no, not even when Jim had died beside him! It had been a moment of the spirit; a moment of absolute integrity, of purity, of unsullied sweetness.

That moment had assailed many long-soiled years. It had grown upon Larrigan ever since, had grown larger, had grown to mean much more than he had dared admit. Now this letter had come to bring it before him again in all its larger aspects.

He made up mechanically and went out on the lot; for an hour he acted mechanically, obeying the director without protest, without thought. Then, during a change in the set, he went to his dressing-room.

Lola was there, standing at his table, reading the letter. Something went cold inside Reever Keene, and he stepped forward as if to take it from her. But she turned upon him, a flood of passion in her face.

"Well," she observed with a sneer, "I guess I got your number now, Mr. Larrigan! Lady signs herself Jim Bleeker, does she? Maybe we're goin' to hear a lot of things that happened—"

"You're making a mistake, Lola," said Reever Keene.

"Mistake, am I?" She shook the letter at him with sudden passion. "Maybe I don't know a chicken's writing when I see it, huh? Well, if you think I'm a fool, this ends it! You can go along with your Jim Bleeker all you damn please! When you get ready to talk turkey to me—"

Lola drew off the walnut diamond and laid it, very carefully, on the corner of the dressing-table under Reever Keene's nose. The whole action was very statu-esque and very dramatic; at least, was so intended.

An instant later Lola uttered a despairing shriek. Reever Keene had seized the wal-nut diamond and had hurled it through the open window—hurled it with a swing that sent it glittering through the air to Heaven only knew where!

"Ends it, eh?" snapped Keene. "Then I'm blamed glad of it! So-long!"

Lola fainted as he vanished, and immediately the dressing-corridor was filled with figures answering her final dramatic shriek. Reever Keene went outside and climbed into his plain green-black car and drove down the street to his lodgings.

Once there, he wiped the paint from his face, with a curse, and began to pack up his things. He paid his landlady. He burned Mrs. Bleeker's letter over the oil-stove. Then he threw his stuff together in the rear of the car, and drove down to the bank, where he drew what money he kept deposited there.

This finished, he went to the central gasoline station and turned over his car to be filled with gas and oil, and to be load-ed with sundry extra five-gallon cases of the same.

While he was watching these affairs being brought to conclusion he heard a wild hail and saw the president's car stopping at the curb, and the president himself descending, red and perspiring of face.

"Hey, Keene!" demanded the magnate heatedly. "What the devil's struck you? They said you blew out o' the studio like a wild man and quit work! Get on back there—"

"Go to hell!" snapped the star. "I've quit being Keene. I'm Aloysius Larrigan, see? And don't get fresh, you!"

"What! Where you going?"

"I'm going to Kansas, where I got busi-ness," retorted Larrigan. "Hurry up with them two cans of oil, over there! And blow up the extry tires while you're about it, partner."

The president seized him by the arm.

"Look here, you!" he exploded violently. "Are you quittin' on the job—*quittin'?*"

"I am," said Larrigan coldly.

"By Heaven, if you bust this contract I'll see to it that you never get another job in front of any damned camera in the world!" raved the other. "I'll—"

"You," said Larrigan, "and your con-tract, and your seventeen companies, and your directors, and your money, and your whole damn camera battery, and your entire double-dashed motion-picture indus-try—go to hell! I'm done! Mustered out!"

He shoved a greenback at the gasoline dealer, climbed into his car, and went. The president gazed after him with eyes of dulled, glazed despair.

"Bein' in the army—that's what done it for him—ruined the best star in the whole damned works!" he murmured dismally.

"Damn the Kaiser!"

Perhaps You have tried to solve

"THE DEVIL'S RIDDLE"

BY EDWINA LEVIN

Beginning April 19

Whose Hands?

by Edwina Levin



COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

I.

NITA met me at the station. I shall always remember her as I saw her from the car window that day, sitting bolt upright among the soft rose cushions of the family carriage, staring fixedly at her hands. And I recall now a curious impression of fear in her attitude—the merest suggestion—so vague that it passed as she looked up. Her dark, eager face was gleaming as brightly as did the silver trappings on the black horses. Uncle Jesse, an aged colored man, stood ready to assist me.

"You are just in time, Eleanor, to find us at out maddest!" she cried as we drove slowly through the narrow, crowded streets over which monogrammed terraces jutted in decaying splendor. "I promise you such adventures as you, in your unromantic New York, never dreamed could happen."

She pointed out historic places, talking in a sort of feverish way as though she must be saying something all the time. On every hand gay buntings and excited, dark faces proclaimed the joy of Mardi Gras, that season when care ceases to be in the quaint old creole city, and love and light and color are all.

We trailed along between flanks of decaying, ivy-colored mansions. Soft, strange negro melodies mingled with the cries of dirty-faced children who sprang out of alleys or doorways and urged us to buy a

St. Anthony or a St. Joseph—"for good luck."

Merrymakers rushed this way and that. Sidewalks and streets were thronged. White, brown, and yellow faces, all eager, excited, passed, a smiling panorama. Horns and musical balloons aided in the expression of their excess emotion. It was the city's great playtime, and no smallest moment must be lost. Young and old, business men and loafers, mingled in happy disregard for work or time or circumstance, all hurrying toward Canal Street, where the joyous din of noise was more insistent.

A mulatto woman selling pralines kept up an incessant wail, that slowly died in the distance as we passed on. A young octoroon strode by us. She never looked to right nor left; but her long arms sawed the air like rhythmic pendulums, and she sang: "To save a poor sinner like me!"

"A little unbalanced!" Nita shuddered. "She keeps that up from sunrise to sundown."

And all at once she fell to gazing at her hands. They were frail, blue-veined, idle hands; but they had no special claim to beauty. Nor did it seem vanity with her. She studied them as if she found in them some unfathomable problem, something beyond her comprehension or belief. For the moment any presence was forgotten. She came back with a start.

"There is the old Hotel Royal," she said.

"One day you must come and see it. It has been condemned for years; but the slave block and the grand stairway are worth seeing. Royalty have lodged there. Does it not seem odd—they laughed and danced and sang—and then—the worms!"

She talked on and on, until her evident excitement began to project itself into my own consciousness. It was as if some fear in the back of her mind were being telegraphed to mine.

Directly I noticed that the huge, wester-ing sun, whose long, golden tongues had been struggling with the shadows of evening to the left of us, was now on our right.

"I was prepared for many things," I remarked, "but not for the phenomenon of a sun that shifts from west to east in the hour. Are we going north or south?"

"We can't speak of the points of the compass here," she said, "on account of the bend of the river, which turns due north at the head of Canal Street; and the streets follow the river; therefore, in going down-town you find the sun setting in what seems the east, also you may get the impression of shifting if you continue long in what seems the same direction. Instead of north, south, east, and west we say, 'woodside, riverside, down-town, and back o' town.'

"Did I not promise you adventures? And if you can explain them as easily as I have explained the phenomenon of the shift-ing sun, you may count yourself both clever and lucky. Dr. Richard says everything in life can be explained; *mais, le pauvre docteur* is an infidel."

She spoke gaily; but I thought I caught an undercurrent of deeper meaning.

After what seemed but seconds, so charmed was I with the scene through which we drove, our carriage stopped.

"This is Esplanade," my hostess was saying. "It is the oldest residential part of town."

I followed her across the sunken pavements to a big iron gate. From it a wide passage tunneled under the building to an open court. She pulled a knob on the side of a gate and a gong boomed so loudly in the distance that it startled me. There was a flash of ebon features topped by a bright bandanna. A low wooden door

opened, and I followed Nita up the stone stoop; then down two little steps and into a narrow alleyway.

The brick walls on either side of us were quite wet. A musty odor assailed us and a sort of chill crept over me; then we came to a dark stairway. A small bell sounded somewhere in the house as Nita reached the top. She turned to wait for me, and I came up from the dark, murky regions into a luxurious reception-hall.

A man hurried toward us.

"Ah, *madame!*" cried the pleasant voice of my host, grasping both my hands in the effusive fashion of the cordial creole, "at last we have the joy to see you again."

After removing our hats we went at once into the great dark dining-room, full of shadows and Old-World magnificence. The day was warm; but a dampness was in the room. A negro boy bending over in a big fireplace tried to encourage a small fire.

We sat down at once to the early dinner that was their custom. The white table, with its old silver plate, gleamed brightly at the solemn faces of dead-and-gone De Charleus that looked down on us from the dark paneled walls.

Amédée de Charleus was unusually hand-some in this setting that seemed to suit him so well. I had not seen either him or Nita so brilliant and entertaining. His ex-treme consideration and courtesy to her struck me afresh. He anticipated her every wish, and mine; and I was no more punc-tilious in my acknowledgments than she.

It was a sort of revelation to me. They had been married ten years, yet never for an instant did they seem to fall into the familiar, and often careless habits which so frequently characterize the conduct of married people. He might have been her fiancé, for all the charming courtesy each showed the other.

Here was the ideal marriage. I could'nt refrain from remarking it.

"*Merci, madame!*" he smiled. "It is quite true. We were made for each other." His caressing black eyes rested on his wife with a look that seemed to say: "Is it not so?" But his smile struck me as strained. He dabbed his napkin at his mus-tache to hide his mouth for the moment.

"It is wonderful—the ideal marriage," she answered. "It would be a horror to be married to the wrong one. Do you think we shall go up the river to meet Rex to-morrow?" She spoke rapidly as though she wished to change the subject. "I do so want Eleanor to see his arrival. It is a gorgeous sight." She turned gaily to me. "You will like it. Rex, you know, is King of the Carnival, and is royally received. He is chosen by the clubs, and must be a wealthy man to support the great honor. But no amount of wealth could buy that honor."

"Which is fitting," said De Charleu. "A king must be of the blood, or he must have crossed the Alps."

"Mistah Burns am in de drawin'-room," announced the negro butler.

There was a brief pause; the woman seemed to stiffen and the man's eyes flashed with a peculiar glitter.

"*Voulez-vous le voir?*" he asked sharply.

"Non, non, mais laissez mes excuses," she replied hesitatingly.

"Burk, tell Mr. Burns *madame* will be delighted to see him." He looked steadily at his wife as he spoke. "We will join him immediately."

"Yassir."

"Pardon me, *madame*," he turned to me. "We speak French together so much that we sometimes forget. *Comprenez vous Français?*"

"Very little," I answered in English, knowing he had insisted on his wife receiving this man against her inclination—and realizing that he did not want me to know.

Their entire attitude had changed. De Charleu drank the black coffee hurriedly and hastily excused himself.

"You will join us soon?" he questioned pleasantly; but looking with pointed intentness at his wife.

"Yes," she replied briefly.

"*Merci.*" He smiled, bowed to both of us, and hurried out.

An embarrassed silence followed.

"Susan, tell Mammy I want her," Nita said constrainedly.

My mind went back four years to that summer in Atlantic City when I had first met this fascinating little creole and the

handsome lover-husband, who always hov-ered near, responding to her slightest glance with some expression of affection. There had been times, however, when the glittering black eyes of the man would startle me. I could not credit the thought at such times, that Amédée de Charleu *watched* his wife.

I had always been at a loss to understand her violent fancy for me—her deter-mination to have me visit her. I was won-dering about this and the curious scene that had been enacted a few moments be-fore, when again I was struck by her strange regarding of her hands. One might almost fancy they were somehow objects of loath-ing to her.

An old negress waddled in.

"What do Mammy's baby want now?" she scolded lovingly.

"Mammy, this is Miss Eleanor." It is one of their customs to introduce a guest by the first name to the servants.

"How y'all is, Mis' Eleanor?" Mammy smiled graciously.

"I wanted to tell you not to wait up for me to-night," Nita continued; then turned to me in the feverish way that seemed natural to her now, though I had not noticed it four years ago, except on occasions. "Come," she said, "we are for-getting our guest. Good night, Mammy."

"Good night, honey," Mammy replied. "Y'all know youah ol' Mammy can't sleep till her little lamb am safe in bed."

I found Mr. Burns a rough-mannered, loud-voiced man, who gave one's hand a vigorous squeeze, then opened his own as if loath to deliver the remains. Amédée de Charleu was effusively friendly, but it somehow did not ring true, and in spite of Nita's graciousness to her guest I could see that she detested him.

"I came over to ask you-all to go up the river on my yacht to-morrow to see Rex come in," he said cordially, when the formalities were over.

"Thank you," Nita spoke hastily, "but I fear my guest would find it a bore. After all, Rex is but a man, and his boat is but a boat."

I looked at her in surprise, as she de-liberately contradicted the wish she had ex-

pressed but a few moments before. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed as though she labored under some extreme excitement.

"On the contrary," said De Charleu, in his soft drawl, "I fancy *madame* would enjoy it immensely. It is one of the sights."

He turned to me as if appealing for confirmation. Embarrassed, I hesitated. Nita at once came to my rescue in her charming way.

"You are right," she replied brightly. "I forgot for the moment that she is a stranger." She turned to Mr. Burns. "We accept with pleasure. You are most kind to think of us. And now you will excuse us?" She rose as she spoke. "I have promised to show *madame* the sights for a little while this evening. And we must be dressing or we shall not get anywhere. She has had a long journey, and will want to retire early."

"I'll take you in my car," Burns said eagerly.

"No, indeed you will not, you most kind man," Nita cried laughingly. "See New Orleans for the first time in a modern conveyance? It would be sacrilege." And before he could protest further she had flashed out of the room. I followed more slowly.

Nita sent Susan, the maid who had served us at dinner, to assist me.

"Show Miss Eleanor to the blue room," she said to the girl, who led the way upstairs.

As Susan and I were quite near the second landing, I looked down in time to see Mammy come out of a room further up the hall. She held out her arms. Nita ran into them and seemed to fairly crumple on the old woman's bosom.

My room was large and cold, but magnificently furnished. The walls may at some time have been blue; now they were dark, and quite devoid of color. The great, canopied, four-post bed that stood in one corner, must have been put in before the room was finished, as never, by any chance, could it have come in by the door. A handsome old dresser, a large wardrobe, a quaint little commode and a what-not, some stiff tapestry chairs, one rocker, a marble-top

table, and a modern writing-desk completed this room of dismal Old World splendor.

The wardrobe alone would have made any room in my tiny flat look crowded, not to mention the bed. Here the room looked barren, almost empty. A poor fire tried hard to brighten the scene.

When my hostess and I were again in the picturesque family carriage, with old Uncle Jesse as driver and guide; with the bright flowers and brighter faces about us that mocked decay, the depression of the great dark house lifted from me, and the lazy, drowsy, singing breezes sweet as musk, laid hold of me, a thrilling torture.

Romance seemed lurking in every vine-draped arbor, under every moss-hung oak; even as tragedy stalks the very streets themselves.

Quaint old stone structures stood like sentinels, in courtyards, whose magnificence was guarded by high brick walls, over which the sweet olive sent its fragrant breath. The umbrella chinaberry, the magnolia, and the flowering mulberry flaunted their scorn of prison walls and sent out long arms of delicious coolness to shelter the sun-stricken streets.

Occasionally one caught a glimpse of dark, flashing eyes from behind heavy wooden shutters. Little negroes who sat about pounding bricks into dust, spied us with their quick eyes, and ran out holding dirty little sacks, high above their small tabby heads.

"Please, missis, buy a bag o' rednin' for your banquette."

White teeth glistened in oily-brown faces, and black eyes snapped as they caught the coins we tossed to them. And they went back to their occupation, seldom recollecting to deliver the merchandise.

Even here in this more quiet part of the city the spirit of pleasure charged in rampant glory. French voices chattered on their highest notes, and shrieked with laughter at anything or nothing. Flowered muslins and silks and brilliant ribbons proclaimed their best dress—and the young made love openly.

"Ah, here we are at the famous old French market," Nita was saying. "Drive close to the banquette, Uncle Jesse."

We made out way under the vast, low, weather-beaten shed, through bawling vendors of the season's products, past the odorous fish and meat stalls to a fragrant spot near the early fruits. We sat down on little wooden benches against big, square posts with long mirrors at our backs. A little octoroon ran forward asking if we would have coffee *au lait* or coffee *noir*.

French, English, Spanish, and creole—the latter a compound of the first three—mingled in a confusing babble, with shrill cries and joyous laughter.

Old carriages and the modern car passed us. Sitting there watching what was to me the strangest scene in America, we drank strong coffee and nibbled rice-cakes and "stage-planks." New York seemed very far away.

Negroes, octoroons, and whites crowded around Nita, each trying to give her some of his wares. Directly the market-house folk began hurriedly and silently to disperse as by a sudden word or sign of mutual consent. I turned in some surprise.

De Charleu stood just behind me. How he had found us he did not say. Nita did not ask. It was plain to see that the market folk felt none of the warmth toward him that they had evinced at sight of his wife. I wondered in a vague way how he had got rid of his guest so as to reach the market almost as soon as we did, and whether he had come on purpose to meet us.

He helped us into the carriage; then took the vacant seat beside Uncle Jesse. He faced back toward us, however, and began to talk in his easy way, the while his eyes left my face now and again in quick flashes at his wife. He pointed out quaint shops, antique stores, and old mansions, telling me many pretty legends about them, and curious superstitions.

"There is the haunted house once occupied by Louis Philippe and also by Lafayette," he said. "One of them still occupies it," he laughed.

"But surely the De Charleus haven't—I began."

"A ghost? We have a legend and a curse. We are pursued by a pair of fantom hands," he said lightly. "Nearly two hundred years ago a De Charleu cut off his

young wife's hands because he saw them caressing another man's head. With the aid of her old nurse she committed suicide. The count, her husband, buried her in the court because she was unworthy to lie in the vault with his people.

"He built the fountain over her to signify his overflowing joy that she had left no children to reign over the house of De Charleu. He was the first to see the fantom hands. They followed him everywhere; haunted, tortured him, until he hanged himself in his room, after leaving in a note the prophetic curse that has followed us.

"It was a long time before they were seen again. Then one night they appeared to one of the De Charleus. He had blown out the candle and retired, and they were suddenly on the wall—white as marble against the blackness of the room. The next day he killed his best friend over a game of cards; and shot himself after he realized what he had done.

"From that time on the hands have always appeared before a tragedy in the family. Usually they have signified that the one to whom they appeared, would, with his own hands, do a cruel murder; not always; but they meant, at least, death by violence.

"My own great-grandfather saw them and killed his wife and himself." His eyes were on Nita's face, not mine, and they seemed to hold a menace. "And," he added significantly, "it has been our custom this past century to choose some gala time for a family tragedy—as if we would end with laughter, in spite of the curse. We are always on the watch for it when the city is in full dress."

"You surely do not believe such—" I began.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I must. The history of our family is in the proof. Is it not so, *ma chère?*" he said to Nita, who sat curiously rigid beside me. His eyes glittered strangely even while he smiled; and his lightly spoken words had an ugly sound.

Here was, somehow, the key to Nita's regard of her hands. Just what the relation might be I was at a loss to understand.

Hers were no fantom hands, certainly. But whatever it was, De Charleu held the key, and I felt that he used it as a means of torture, like a knife in the hands of a cruel small boy.

We dropped him at Canal Street, where the crowds were so great that we moved with difficulty. Lights blazed in long festoons down the long streets.

I was surprised several times to see my host in our neighborhood, and in the most unexpected moments. Always he appeared unconscious of our presence. If Nita ever saw him, she gave no sign, but talked on.

Once when we stopped to let a crowd of maskers pass, a young man of perhaps thirty, with fair hair and keen gray eyes, threaded his way to us. Nita introduced him as M. Randolph. He talked to me with the inquisitive courtesy of the Southerner toward a stranger; but his eyes dwelt on Nita in a fashion that left no room for doubt as to his feelings for the brilliant little woman.

I caught myself watching her for some answering sign on her vivid, dark face. There was none. She chatted along gaily, indifferently, about many things; then suddenly I felt her stiffen. I looked up, and, following her eyes, found De Charleu coming toward us.

"Ah, M. Randolph!" he cried, extending his hand in great cordiality on reaching the carriage. "I hear you are doing big things, eh?"

The young man made an embarrassed gesture of dissent, and De Charleau turned to me.

"M. Randolph is one of our brilliant young attorneys. He will be our next Congressman from this district." He seemed to say it in the tone of one who wishes to entertain a guest and compliment a friend. "He is a young man of great charm and promise. Once he wished to be my deadly rival and deprive me of my countess—*mais*—" De Charleu shrugged his shoulders—"those things are arranged for us, and so it was destined he shall lose her, and I win." He laughed softly. "Now he is my friend; but I suspect he would not weep if I am laid beside my ancestors; for which I do not blame him."

De Charleu's black eyes turned with adoration toward his lovely wife as if to say: "But look at her and you will see he is not to blame."

His words and manner were light, almost frivolous; his white teeth were exposed in a good-humored smile, and redolent with flattery toward his wife; but, somehow, back of all, there seemed something sinister.

Nita accepted the implied compliment with a little, forced laugh.

Randolph flushed under the creole's words; but his own smile did not waver. He retorted with some pleasant banter for De Charleu, a compliment for *madame*, and left us in a few moments.

I was curiously shocked by the scene. It seemed in bad taste at best, and so out of keeping with my suave, courteous host, who also left us directly, saying he was going up to the club.

Nita's eyes, that had grown absent as we trailed along, again drifted out of space to her own limp hands. She studied them for a long while; then apropos of nothing began to tell me about young Randolph, as if she thought she must explain her husband's words.

"We were in love with each other as boy and girl," she said, her dark face flushing noticeably under the lights. "I married Amédée by my father's request before he died, and never since my marriage have we, M. Randolph and I, exchanged a word except in public. Have you ever been greatly in love, Eleanor?" she asked, a catch in her voice. Then she went on to speak with the passionate frankness of her people.

In this sweet, warm, palpitating land of the creoles, where the very breath is love, they have none of our reticence about discussing matters of the heart. But as we are ashamed of love, so they are ashamed of divorce.

In the course of a gay evening, full of shifting scenes, Nita seemed to forget her disturbing thoughts.

It was almost twelve when she turned to me, contrition in her big, dark eyes.

"But I am a sorry hostess to forget how tired you must be!" she exclaimed. "Uncle Jesse, drive home at once."

"Oh, I love it!" I cried. "It is no wonder your women marry at fifteen and sixteen, and your men are lovers from the cradle to the grave. Cupid is in the air! Do you not feel the brush of his wings to-night?"

"No—not that," she said absently. And all at once a vague dread, a feeling of impending something, began to lay hold of me. I almost wished myself out of this gay city with its undercurrent of tragedy and superstition.

On reaching my room at last, I stepped out of a long French window, and found myself on a balcony that ran all around and overhung a big, square court. All the rooms gave upon this great space, and several straight stairways led from the two balconies directly to the ground.

To my overwrought imagination it seemed as if I stood before a monster vault, and that the balconies were shelved for storing the bodies. A full white moon aided the illusion by casting weird shadows on a fountain standing like some huge ghost in the center, and I thought of the young countess lying there alone for more than a century.

"You baf am ready." I jumped at the sound of Susan's voice. "Dem's the servants' quarters," she continued, smiling, and pointing directly across the court. "All but Mammy's—she sleep down-stairs nex' to Mis' Nita. Her maw done tell Mammy to take care o' her when Mis' Nita was a little baby, and Mammy, she mos' lak Mis' Nita's own maw."

I could not sleep, and dragged a chair out on the balcony where I could watch the low-hung moon that dimmed the sparkle of the stars; thrilling, exalting, torturing with its flood of mellow light. The distant sounds of revelry reached me faintly, drifting up with the odor of honeysuckle and the penetrating sweetness of the night-blooming cereus. As the flowers sleep not, so New Orleans, during the Mardi Gras.

It was three o'clock when I finally blew out my light and sank luxuriously into my bed of soft down. I was very tired, but the strong coffee made me wakeful, and I was restlessly tossing about when a loud, piercing scream rang through the old rooms. It was a fearful cry.

I sat up in bed, straining in the darkness. The blood rushing in my ears was all I heard. I got up, lighted my lamp, and waited for—I knew not what. Not a sound broke the stillness.

I went out on the balcony. The servants' quarters were dark. Gathering up my feeble courage I slipped down-stairs. Nobody was stirring. Clearly I was the only one in all that household who had heard. That this was so seemed unbelievable. It somehow filled me with unspeakable dread. The walls creaked, and I jumped and looked quickly behind me. I should not have been at all surprised had a De Charleu ghost stalked in.

Uneasy, and yet angry at myself for yielding my modern mind to the insidious atmosphere of superstition, I finally lay down and left the lamp burning.

The morning found me tired and worn. Susan brought my *petite déjeuner* and was as smiling as usual.

Cautiously I mentioned being wakeful and hearing a noise. "Was any one sick in the night?" I asked. I saw at once that she, too, had heard that scream.

"Ah 'spec' hit was de ghos'," she said after some thought.

"What ghost?"

"Lady Marie. She stay in de room nex' to yourn. Did hit soun' close or—down-stairs?" she asked cunningly.

Seeing I was on forbidden ground I pretended not to hear.

"'Cause ef hit was down-stairs hit mus' a' been Mammy," Susan went on, determined to put my mind at rest. "She was mos' possible havin' one of her nightmares. She plumb full of nightmares, dat ol' woman is."

I smiled as though satisfied; but Susan was not. She fussed around my room several minutes after she was through serving me, split some pine fat into kindling, though there was plenty cut, and put the little hatchet that was part of the fireplace equipment carefully in place with the poker and tongs. Finally it came out:

"Hit worries Mis' Nita, dem nightmares of Mammy's," Susan said. "Mis' Nita am powerful lovin', and she am scared Mammy mought die, and maybe so she

didn't wake up, and won't know nothin' 'bout hit unless you tells her."

"I won't tell her, Susan," I said. And with a broad expanse of white teeth, she went out.

De Charleu and Nita were pleasant, and he was charmingly affectionate, as usual at breakfast. No mention was made of that horrid scream of the night before. I might almost have been inclined to think it a dream; but I knew I had not been asleep. Besides, Susan had heard it, too. Why had she not got up, or called some one? And why had she been so anxious that I should not mention it to Nita? And why were so many things in this house?

"Have you ever turned a cup?" Nita asked gaily, as we lingered over the table. De Charleu had left us alone.

"Oh, yes, lots of times," I answered; "but I use tea grounds."

"Coffee grounds are better," she assured me seriously. "Mammy is wonderful at reading them. Susan, tell her we want her to read our fortunes."

She began to talk in her bright, rapid way of the carnival, the while we drained away our coffee, leaving only the grounds. Then he turned the cups three times above our heads, making a wish, and set them top side down in the saucers.

"You go 'long, honey," Mammy smiled, as she ambled in. "Yo'-all know dey ain't no truf in dem groun's."

Mammy politely took my cup first. "Ah sees some money in de cup, an' a surprise. You is gwine to git a letter 'foh long. Dey's a little sickness ahead of you, an' a long trip."

"I suspect I'm going home," I laughed.

"Yassim, Ah 'spec' you is. Dah it is, plain as daylight," she said. "Dey's gwine to be a big crowd round you, an' a heap of talk, too, an' folks laughin'. Sho is."

"That will happen to-day," I smiled.

Dr. Richard, the old family physician, dropped in during the fortune telling. Nita introduced him, and I recollect what she had said: "*Le pauvre docteur* is an infidel." Mammy continued my fortune with many amusing platitudes. I was rather astonished to see that the doctor did not look upon this mild pastime as amusing,

but seemed to regard it with distinct disfavor.

"Rot, perfect rot!" he sputtered.

"Oh, no! but it is not, *M. le Docteur!*" cried Nita, seriously, "for how can you explain—"

"Explain? Anything can be explained," he broke in, it seemed to me more briskly than the occasion demanded. "There is no supernatural thing in life that common sense can't explain," he said, rising. "Come to my office as soon as the carnival is over. I've made up my mind to have a serious talk with you, young woman. I don't work during the carnival, though. Nobody does."

He winked at me; but I felt that he was serious. After he went out Mammy took up Nita's cup and stared long into it.

"Hit's 'bout de same, honey," she said gravely.

"Are *they* there, Mammy?" the little woman asked eagerly.

"Yes, honey."

Nita's dark, eager face seemed suddenly to sag all over. She stared vacantly at an old portrait, whose faded face had a ghastly hue. A deathwatch ticked loudly in the stillness. A mouse squeaked behind the wainscot—and Mr. Burns was announced.

II.

As we had planned, we went to meet Rex, King of the Carnival, on Mr. Burns's boat.

No royal personage was ever more graciously received. From the time his craft was sighted, three miles up the river, until he landed, was a deafening roar of cannon, a clanging of bells, and blowing of whistles. The big, golden key to the city was handed him as he stepped ashore, and New Orleans was figuratively and literally wide open.

We followed him from the river and up town as far as St. Charles Street.

Everybody seemed to go mad. The parade was an imposing military affair, and lasted all day.

In the evening Canal Street seemed lifted out of some fairy tale. Music mingled with laughter. Gay buntings fluttered

everywhere, and myriads of varicolored lights shone on the gorgeous floats and the merry maskers.

We watched this wild revelry—this sea of surging, pushing, laughing, swaying humanity, from the balcony of Pickwick Club, which is reserved for the families of members. Other balconies are improvised to seat thousands across the front of every business house; but the streets catch the great overflow.

I was watching a masked knight in the "Cave of the Winds," who waved gaily to us. All at once his arm dropped, and he seemed to draw himself up taut as steel under the head of a monster serpent. At that moment Mr. Burns bent over Nita, and her pointed nails cut sharply into the flesh of my arm.

The now-disappearing knight did not look our way again. Nita's hands were like ice, and her nerves were aquiver.

"Who was the knight in the Cave of the Winds?" I asked.

"Amédée," she whispered.

After the parade we made our way to Rex's ball. Even the queen in all the crown jewels was not more radiant than this exquisite little creole in a gown of orange tissue and old lace. When the grand march was over we slipped out to attend a private reception given in honor of the royal visitors.

I had grown accustomed to Nita's sudden changes; but I could not make her out to-night. She was glorious! Dazzling! Gay! But with a gaiety that made me feel like tears; and twice I caught her studying her hands.

"May I have a dance?" asked a pleasant voice at my elbow, and I handed my program to young Randolph. He looked very handsome in evening dress, his fair head showing to advantage among so many dark ones. "Nita," he said hesitatingly to my hostess, who stood beside me, "mayn't I have one?"

She seemed to waver. I looked away as though interested in a distant couple.

"It is ten years since." He spoke very low, for her ears only.

There was another instant of hesitation; then the music struck up, and I heard her

say: "Come." There was a note of recklessness in her voice.

Randolph's arm closed around her as if hungry for the feel of her slim form, and I wondered what they would say to each other in the public privacy of the dance—these two, who had loved so greatly and had not spoken together in private for ten years.

De Charleu claimed me for that dance. He was abstracted, silent; and I realized for the first time that he was actually homely; that only his splendid animation made him appear handsome. His brilliant, black eyes and flashing teeth distracted one's attention from the chin and lips that were unpleasant in repose.

It was nearly four o'clock when he escorted Nita and me home. He went back to the club.

Mammy met us on the first landing. "Ah had de water on for an hour, honey, an' Ah started drippin' you coffee jus' as soon as Ah heard you-all comin' down de street."

"You don't mind if I come up with you?" Nita asked as Mammy left us. There was an exhilaration in her eyes and voice—a sort of high-tensioned, reckless happiness.

"By all means come up," I said. Soon Mammy hustled into my room with the coffee things. A door slammed somewhere in the house, and Nita started up in fright; then settled down again.

"The family ghost," she laughed. "I hope she has not disturbed you."

I thought of my first night in that room; but I felt that she was watching me, and answered: "Not at all, I hope she will pay me a visit before I go home."

"Don't say that," she whispered. The eyes she turned on me showed how horrible to her was even the thought of a visit from the spirit lady. "You think me foolish," she smiled in an effort at self-recovery. "Has Susan come in yet, Mammy?" she asked absently.

"No'm, honey. Dat nigger gal ain't got no sense o' time nor nuttin' else when de Mardi Gras am gwine on. She done lef' Tom and got a new man. She git a new one every Mardi Gras God send."

Nita heaved a heavy sigh; put her hands up to her eyes as if to shut out something, then asked suddenly:

"Do you believe in warnings?"

"No, and surely you don't!"

"The De Charleus have always known when a great tragedy has hung over them," she replied gravely. "They have always been warned of its approach, yet they have never been able to avert it."

"Then what is the good of the warning?"

"I don't know. Perhaps there is a way if one could only find it. If one only could!" There was a far-away look in her eyes, "The curse—if it could be lifted—if it only could! But it can't! No, not so long as there is a De Charleu living."

There was a long pause. I waited for her to speak, but her eyes simply drifted back out of space to her own limp hands, and I was forgotten.

"Not so long as there is one!" she repeated.

"Are there many?" I asked softly.

"He is the only one." The absence that looked out of her eyes now trailed into her voice. Though she answered my question, she was plainly talking to herself.

"Your husband?"

"Yes. And there is an old prophecy that says: 'The man shall pay his debt to the woman, and the house of De Charleu shall fall by the hand of a woman—a woman who is a De Charleu, but not of the blood.' I am the first, not of the De Charleu blood to see the fantom hands; and they have appeared to me only in the coffee grounds. Mammy saw them three years after I was married."

In a flash of horror I understood her tragic contemplation of her hands. Also I recalled De Charleu's story of the legend, and the menace in his voice.

"But you say it was Mammy who saw them?" I suggested when I could trust myself to speak.

"True!" A new and staggering thought seemed to hold her for a moment. "But no; they are always in my cup."

She got up suddenly. Some one was

moving below. "It is Amédée. I must go. Good night, dear. If I should die tonight," she whispered as she kissed me, "I have had one little minute of happiness! And it is worth whatever comes after—in this world or the next."

When she had gone I sat pondering over the hideous situation of this woman, her evident fear of her fate and of herself; and the gruesome fact that De Charleu knew, and seemed to foster the horrid notion, which I was now convinced he did not even believe; else he would not have dared use it to torture her, as he undoubtedly did. Also I wondered over the curious nature of the passionate creole who would pay here and hereafter for one moment of love and happiness, yet is such a slave to race traditions that a young girl may be disposed of in marriage by her family; and divorce, for any cause whatsoever, is unknown.

I was in a state of cold terror; unable to go to sleep—waiting for—the development of Nita's words, perhaps. When the morning dawned, and nothing had happened, I was inclined to be vexed at myself. The morbid atmosphere was fastening its subtle fangs of suggestion on my twentieth-century mind!

III.

THE carnival spirit still hovered over us when the eve of the Lenten season arrived. On the morrow the gay city must put on sackcloth and ashes, and do penance for the sins of the past year—and especially those of the past fortnight.

Nita did not appear at breakfast. My host spoke lightly of her absence.

"She begs you will excuse her this morning," he said. "She is quite worn out—too much festivity," he laughed. "I am to be your guide to-day. She will join us this afternoon at the old Absinthe House, at one time the headquarters of the famous pirate, Lafitte. You must not miss it. And there is the Cabildo, where the transfer was made of a land that was an empire in itself."

I pleaded a headache, and would not go with him. Somehow I had come to loathe his white-toothed smile, his glowing black eyes, and soft, drawling voice. Besides,

my mind was deeply concerned over Nita—I could not imagine her volcanic vitality slumping like this.

Mammy was clearly disposed not to let me into her mistress's room; but I was determined. She lay propped up high on her big, canopied bed, with its lace draperies and mosquito netting back of her. I paused, shocked. Her face was haggard, her eyes—almost insane, it seemed to me.

"Nita!" I cried. "What is it?"

"Oh, I can't keep it from you," she said. "I have abbut reached the end of my strength. What do you think I did last night? I sat on the floor all night, my ear pressed against the door, waiting for my husband to come home and kill me!"

I sank down on the foot of her bed, unable to speak.

"Mammy was with me. She always is," Nita went on. "I think Amédée loved me once," she said, in a low voice that somehow frightened me. "But when he knew for a certainty that the De Charleus curse had fallen on me, he grew suddenly to watch me and hate me. He is always courteous and devoted when in company; but when we are alone—" She shuddered. "Those scenes! Those wretched scenes! He gets out his big hunting-knife and sharpens it, and taunts me, and tells me how he will wipe out the curse with my blood if I do not have a care."

"My God!" I cried.

"I would not tell you," she half sobbed, "but I feel that the end is near; and besides, I have kept silent for seven years. I must speak or I shall die." Her words tumbled out. "I was sixteen when I married him, and I did not know what to do." Her voice rose. "He followed me about the streets, stepping out of sight in doorways and alleys, until I was almost mad.

"At last I quit going out except when he could be with me. Then he brought his friends to the house, and compelled me to receive them! And if he thought he detected undue warmth in my manner—how can I speak of the awful nights that have followed when I would sit waiting for him to come back, break in, and kill me."

Now her voice sank to a shuddering whisper. "I began at last to wonder when

it would happen. I could picture the whole awful thing. I knew just what he would do it with—that awful hunting-knife!" She sat up straight. "I hoped I would not struggle and make him scar my face!"

She drew a deep, gasping breath, and her eyes had a wild look in them. She stretched her arms in front of her as if to push something from her.

"I could see my body as it lay in the drawing-room, in my high-necked robes. I saw the people come and go; then I followed myself to the vault in the old cemetery. Oh, the horror of that vault, with those dead and gone De Charleus! And the darkness!" She fell back on her pillows. "At this point I would seem to go mad! I would wish that I could put him there, and stay myself in the light—the beautiful light! At last it has taken possession of me." She spread her hands and spoke resignedly, then sat up rigidly.

"I think of it constantly. I picture it over and over again, and I am always glad, glad when the great iron doors of the vault close on him and I am free from the daily horror that hangs over me." There was a hectic light on her drawn face.

"I do not want to do it! My whole soul and body revolts against it. I have talked with the priest about my unhappiness, though I have not told him of my fears. He, good man, cannot give his consent that I leave my husband."

She stopped suddenly. I was too horrified to speak.

"Lately he has lost large sums at gambling; and one night he put up the old house—and lost it. The man who won it told Amédée that we could continue to live in it on condition that he introduce him into our set. It was then that the real tragedy began. Amédée conceived the idea of setting a trap for the man. I was to encourage his attentions, and when he declared himself, I was to ask for Amédée's written promise of the house. I refused at first—and my husband said he would kill me. He got out his knife—it had been newly sharpened. And—I—promised him!

"He often leaves us, that man and me, alone together. Oh, it is a nightmare! I am almost mad. Last night at the recep-

tion, the man took me into the conservatory and declared his love for me. I was in a panic. If I refused him too suddenly I would lose the home, and Amédée would kill me. If I accepted his caresses and Amédée learned of it, he was just as likely to kill me.

"For, curious as it may seem, he is insanely jealous of me, and of every one who looks at me. I tried to think of a way. Suddenly I went to pieces, and told the man I loathed him—I saw a movement among a group of palms near me—and Amédée came out from behind them when the man had left me. And—well, I have promised to get the papers to-night. I do not know if I can."

She stopped speaking and lay back on her pillows. I went and took her in my arms.

"Don't pity me," she said. "I could not bear it."

"I'm going to take you to New York with me to-morrow," I said.

She sat up, frightened. "Oh, I could not go! He would not let me."

"He is not going to know when or where you go."

"Oh, but he would find out. Besides—the church—the disgrace! None of my family have been in any scandal. And he would follow us."

Finding that further talk but excited her, I left her with Mammy, who came in bringing a julep to brace her for the ordeal of this last night of festivity—and something more.

But I made up my mind that, with the assistance of Dr. Richard and young Randolph, I would put Amédée de Charleu where he could not harm his wife.

The afternoon and evening seemed endless. Somehow Nita, under Mammy's skillful hand, and by the aid of her own terrific pride, managed to recover her dynamic vivacity. None could have guessed the horror she had come through only the night before. She did not mention it to me again. And I felt that she already regretted her burst of confidence. They have no lip pride, these creoles; but it is deep in the hearts of them; buried in every grave; writ on every tomb.

That night, when I saw her beckon to Burns, who had received an invitation to the Dwyer ball through the De Charleus, I turned sick. Her smile was perfectly done. I had to go out on the balcony for air. Returning in a few minutes to the ballroom, I looked everywhere for Nita and Burns. Nor could I find De Charleu. After a while she came in on the arm of Burns, and her face was so bright, so gay that I thought she must have succeeded without any unpleasant complications. I had not estimated the fulness of her proud control.

That night when we returned home, with my fears temporarily allayed by her manner and my determination to start some action for her on the following day, I sank into a deep sleep almost as soon as I touched my bed.

Suddenly I was roused to full consciousness by a loud, piercing scream. A second and third followed in quick succession. There were two voices, and they came from the direction of Nita's room. I don't know how I got down the dark stairs; but all at once I found myself at her door. It was open. No one was there, so I ran to Mammy's room, from which I now heard hideous moans.

How can I describe the sight that met my eyes at that door!

There, in the pale lamplight, crouched against the wall in an attitude of abject terror, stood Nita; her head was bent as if to ward off a blow, her arms were half extended, as though she sought to push them from her. Her hands hung limp—those frail, blue-veined hands that had always seemed so fascinatingly useless! I followed her stricken gaze to the fireplace, and there on the floor lay Amédée de Charleu—dead!

Mammy was huddled in a heap on the further side of the room. "Oh, Lawd A'mighty!" she moaned. "Oh, Lawd A'mighty!" She rocked from side to side.

"Nita! Mammy! Oh, my God!" I cried.

"Ah nevah meant to done hit!" Mammy pleaded, looking up at me for the first time. "Ah nevah meant to done hit!" she kept repeating over and over.

"Mammy, what are you saying?" I grasped her shoulder and shook her.

"Ah never meant to done hit, Lawd! O Lawd! You knows Ah never!" And that was all she would say. Nita seemed to shrink further and further against the wall, while she kept horrified eyes on the form of her husband, and continued to hold her hands away from her. I sank on a near-by chair, too weak to stand. My mind was paralyzed. I could not think of anything to do but sit and look upon the awful scene before me.

Never once did the old negress cease her low moans. "Ah never meant to done hit!"

At last I roused myself. "Nita! Nita!" I cried. "Come away!" I took hold of her, and for the first time her eyes left that ghastly thing on the floor. She looked at me in a dazed way, and let me lead her toward the door. When we reached the hall, Mammy rose with a scream.

"Great Gawd A'mighty! You-all ain't gwine to leave me wid dat thing!" she cried in a frenzy of terror, running out after us and slamming the door behind her.

"Mammy!" I commanded. "Stop that screeching and wake the servants."

"Oh, no'm! Ah has to go thru dat dark cou't, and Mars' Amédée's ghost gwine to git me shore!"

"I'll go," I replied. "You stay with your mistress. We must notify the authorities."

"De police?"

"Yes, of course."

"Oh, Mis' Eleanor, does you think dey'll hang me? Oh, Blessed Mother, Ah never meant to done hit!"

Nita sat quite still, always with her hands held away from her, hanging in that peculiar droop.

Mammy's wailing voice followed me across the great, dark, indoor garden to the servants' quarters, and sent waves of horror over me.

The negroes fled in panic. I phoned Dr. Richard, and then we three women sat huddled, miserably waiting in Nita's room, with the thought of that awful thing in the one adjoining us, and the sound of revelry coming to us — those sounds that would

cease only with the dawn of Lent. It somehow brought home to me life's great drama of suffering and dying within sound of laughter and song.

Mammy kept moaning at wide intervals. Nita's eyes roamed about in a way that increased my nervousness. Suddenly she began to speak. It was as if she thought aloud, without realizing that her lips gave utterance.

"I had to get it!" she murmured. "What was I to do?" She turned to me suddenly, and her words came so fast that I could hardly catch them. "I had to get it—the paper of which I told you. So in desperation I made a clean breast of the whole thing, and threw myself on Burns's mercy. It was then that I learned how good a crude, rough man may be; how infinitely more the heart of a man counts than his breeding."

"He was wild at Amédée. He got up and stamped about, calling my husband all sorts of names. It warmed my heart; but I was in a panic, because I did not know what he would do. I humbled myself. 'Please,' I said, 'give me the paper. He will kill me if you do not.' Then I turned to see—Amédée.

"Mr. Burns saw him, too, and he walked up to my husband, and with words of most deadly insult, handed him the paper, hitting him in the face with it as he did so. Then he took me back to the ballroom. And Amédée did not dare to resent."

I thought of her as I saw her enter that room, laughing and talking, gay and brilliant, and I wondered at the depths of the frivolous-seeming Latin.

So busy had I been with watching her that I had not noticed her companion. Now I recalled the grim look that was upon his face.

"Amédée had been drinking heavily," she went on, "and when we were in our room he told me I had reached the end. I had disgraced him and the De Charleu family. With calm, cold voice and glittering eyes he said he was going to send me to meet them. He drew out his knife deliberately. Oh, my God!" She threw her arms over her head.

Then all at once she began to scream.

Nor could Mammy and I quiet her. Dr. Richard, arriving in a few minutes, administered a hypodermic, and directly she fell asleep.

New Orleans, whose very history is written in blood, was deeply stirred. The De Charleus were so prominent, and everybody apparently knew about the curse that was believed by many to follow the family.

Young Randolph phoned me to meet him at his office. He was distracted for Nita, but would not go to the house. He wanted all the details from me first hand, and took no pains to hide his love.

"They took her from me, damn them!" he said, "but they can't take my love from her. Tell her that, please, Mrs. Warren, and that I stand ready to help her if I'm needed. And tell her"—he hesitated, and seemed embarrassed—"that—nothing under heaven or in hell can change my feelings for her—that—no matter what—she's done—I justify her and love her, and will go to hell to serve her."

A slow, dark red suffused his face, and with a shock I realized that he believed what I had not allowed my mind to formulate—that Nita de Charleu had killed her husband.

In a state bordering on collapse, I returned to that house of horror to find that Dr. Richard had taken Nita to his private sanatorium. Susan, the only servant beside Mammy who had not run away, told me that when Nita waked up she began wringing her hands and whispering to herself. Susan's eyes rolled with terror.

Officers were already in charge of the death chamber.

Mammy's story was simple. She had killed her master. She had used a hatchet that she always had in the room for splitting kindling. She kept it on the hearth. He was drinking. He came in and started at her with a knife for scorching one of his best shirts. She had the hatchet in her hand when he came at her to beat her, and she struck out, never thinking of what she had in her hand.

"Had he ever beaten you before?" she was asked.

"Yas, sir, heaps of times. And dis time

he come at me wid a knife. Dat knife you found by him side."

"Why did he beat you and go after you with a knife at that time of night over a shirt?" asked the coroner, glancing at a large hunting-knife he had found by the body.

"He was layin' it out for mawnin'. Oh, gentlemen, you ain't gwine to put de black cap on my haid, is you; an' a rope aroun' mah neck, and squeeze my eyes out, is you? Ah never meant to done hit—'deed Ah didn't!"

The one weak spot in her testimony was that the scorched shirt could not be found; nor could Mammy give any account of it.

The old woman was bound over for the grand jury without bail, and I was held as a witness. I moved to a quiet hotel up-town. Somehow I could not endure the old city that had so fascinated me at first.

I was besieged by Nita's friends, black and white, for some explanation—some word from her. Dr. Richard allowed no one to see her, and I learned from him that he was very anxious about her condition. Young Randolph was like a maniac. He became my shadow. Somehow he seemed to feel that being with me brought him nearer to her. He offered his services to defend Mammy, while Dr. Richard and I tried to make her as comfortable as possible by taking her delicacies daily. But she ate hardly at all. Her one thought was for her "chile."

A true bill being found against her by the grand jury, I arranged bail for my appearance when court convened, and went home.

IV.

GREAT white bowls of cotton were bursting in their joyous fulness, soft, swishing winds were sighing through corn and cane fields, when I sadly returned to the land of the creoles. The big, moss-hung oaks had a blown, drifting, lonely look, and along the reedy shores of the river and bayous the mourning dove and the noisy partridge complained to clattering palm-trees; but the flowers had not heard the voice of autumn, and blossomed in tropical abandon. The old city reflected these war-

ring forces, and was both bright and melancholy.

Mammy's trial had been postponed on account of Nita's illness. An officer had to clear the entrance when Nita entered the court-room with Dr. Richard.

Fat old negro women in ample aprons and kerchiefed heads, young octoors in brilliant cotton gowns and sailor hats, dried-up old negro men in jeans and misfit shoes with toes protruding, and brawny young men in dingy homespun, crowded against the walls of the court-room, a motley fringe around the white friends that filled the seats.

From my place down in front I leaned eagerly forward. I was shocked by Nita's face, that looked so strained and white against her somber black gown; but glad to see the light of reason in her big, brown eyes, that immediately sought out Mammy.

"Lemme git to ma chile, white man!" cried the old woman to a bailiff who restrained her. Owing to the fact that almost the entire court, including the dignified judge, and prosecuting attorney, were intimate friends of the De Charleus, and had been scolded and petted as little boys by Mammy, she was not inclined to stand in awe of, or to "mind them."

Impulsive, passionately sympathetic, the crowd rose as if by common consent at sight of Nita. Order being restored, the tedious business of impaneling a jury began.

Randolph sat at a long table in front of the judge's stand. I did not see him look once in Nita's direction. Nor did she look at him. The judge was pale, and kept turning the pages of a big book.

Outside the sun grew hotter as the day advanced, and a lazy, drowsy breeze swept in through the windows without cooling the air. Big palmetto and hand-painted ivory fans, in masculine and feminine hands, were going all over the sweltering room, a constant mass of choppy motion that made one dizzy to watch.

At last the trial began.

The servants, on examination, admitted reluctantly that the dead man had never struck or even spoken crossly to any of them. They, however, had disliked him,

for no reason that they could give. Whatever Amédée de Charleu had been to his wife, it was clear that he would not demean himself by bickering with his servants.

Witness after witness was called by the prosecution to prove that De Charleu had been the soul of courtesy to black and white—but in each case it came out that nobody liked him. Mammy's contention of cruelty, however, was slowly crumbling away. Clearly other motives were back of the crime.

The following day I took the stand for the defense. I was in a panic lest under cross-examination I would tell things that I had determined they should not wring from me. Convinced as I was, that Mammy was innocent of De Charleu's murder, I was still not disposed to turn suspicion on the little woman who had suffered so much at the dead man's hands. I trusted Randolph to get Mammy off somehow.

"Did you see the knife beside M. De Charleu's body when you first entered the room?" asked William Dorsey, the prosecuting attorney, when Randolph had finished my examination for the defense.

"Yes, I recollect seeing it," I said, "though I didn't think of it at the time."

"Had you see that knife before in the defendant's room, or in her possession?"

"I had not been in her room before that night," I said, "and I had never seen any knife in Mammy's possession."

"Had you ever noticed any ill-feeling on the defendant's part toward her master?" he asked.

"No, she was always most respectful and pleasant toward him."

"Had you any reason to believe that the hatchet was kept in her room for malicious purposes?"

Randolph rose with an objection, which was overruled.

"No, I had not," I answered. "The hatchet was part of the fireplace equipment used for splitting kindling on the hearth."

I breathed a sigh of thankfulness when told to stand down.

Then Mammy was called by Randolph. She was a pitiable object. Her old, black

face was ashen, and great tears, rolling ceaselessly down her cheeks, fell on her ample bosom.

I wept without shame, as did many women in the court-room. Knowing that the defendant need not testify, I was surprised that Randolph would allow her to take the stand, since I knew his fears, and how easy it might be for a clever man like William Dorsey to trap the simple-minded old woman.

But her testimony could not be shaken. She had killed her master over a scorched shirt, *and she had burned the shirt!* When asked why she had not told about burning the shirt at the inquest, she said because she didn't see no use in telling everything she knew at once. She was saving something for the big judge.

"Where did you keep the knife ordinarily?" questioned the prosecuting attorney.

Sudden wrath dried Mammy's tears.

"Willie," she cried, "you know Ah ain't had dat knife! How Ah'm gwine to keep dat knife ordinarily when Ah ain't had hit at all? What you tryin' to make out? You know dat ain't mah knife jes as well as Ah do!"

A laugh ran over the court, and "Willie" applied himself to the papers on the table before him. In her excitement Mammy had forgotten the prefix cultivated after Dorsey had come back from college, a young man.

When Mammy stepped down, there was one of those strange hushes that so often go before some portentous moment; a curious sense of waiting. After a pause that seemed age long, but was in reality very brief, Randolph turned to the judge. I expected, as did every one, perhaps, that Nita would now be called. Instead, he merely said. "The defendant rests, your honor."

"Gentlemen of the jury," Dorsey began.

"Wait!" It was Nita's voice! Sharp, high-pitched! Her slim, black-robed figure stood out strikingly against the white walls of the court-room. The judge looked at her, surprise and sympathy in his eyes.

"Wait nuttin'!" cried Mammy. "Jedge, you go on tend to your business!"

The court rapped for order. Dr. Richard spoke to Nita in a low voice; but she paid no attention to him. Everybody looked uneasy, and there was a whispering and general restlessness. Randolph's fair face was white and drawn.

Nita extended her arms toward the judge, moistened her lips, opened them—but no sound came. Never have I seen any one struggle so for speech. A great lump ached in my throat. Dr. Richard tried to force her back into her chair. She resisted wordlessly. When at last she spoke, it was only a tense whisper, but it penetrated every corner of that room.

"They don't look like murderous hands, do they!" She turned her hands over, looking at them curiously. "Yet that is what they are!"

A gasp went over the court-room. Randolph jumped up. The judge signed to him, he sank back and covered his face with his hands.

"Yes, those hands killed Amédée de Charleu."

Wonder and horror were in her voice, and in her eyes. There was a shifting in the jury box. The crowd leaned forward. A woman cried out. Then there was silence. Fans paused, and it seemed as if the very air held its breath. Mammy sat paralyzed.

"It is the old story of the De Charleu curse," Nita went on directly. "The man has paid his debt to the woman, and the house of De Charleu has fallen by her hand."

"Tain't so!" Mammy's shrill voice cut the stillness like the crack of a whip. "Don' you believe her, jedge!" The old woman tried to get out of the prisoner's chair. "She sick—she 'mos' crazy! She don' know what she's talkin' 'bout!" the old woman went on excitedly.

"Be quiet, Mammy!" the judge commanded.

"Ah isn't gwine to be quiet till you takes me out an' hangs me. Ah done murder Mars' Amédée, an' Ah ain't never gwine to be happy till Ah's hung!"

"Silence!" commanded the court.

"Ah wants to be hung, Ah tells you!" the old woman was sobbing violently,

"Ah's tired of foolin' lak dis! Ah wants to go home to glory!"

"Mammy, I'll have you removed from the court if you're not quiet." And at last she sat down.

The grim humor of her words was lost in the tragic pathos of her self-immolation.

The court waited for Nita to proceed. The prosecution made as if to speak.

"Let her tell her story in her own way," the judge said quietly.

"Amédée told me," Nita continued, "as soon as he knew we would have no children, that *I was the woman!* A De Charleu—but not of the blood, by whose hand the house must fall! At first I would not believe him; Mammy saw the fantom hands in my cup, and I knew it was true—that the De Charleu curse had fallen on me."

A murmur of horror ran over the court.

Nita's voice dropped so low that I could hardly hear.

"He began to taunt me," she whispered, "and say that I would never have a chance to do it. Oh, I was so afraid! Of him—and of myself! On the night of the—I—the accident—"

She seemed unable to go on. It was hideous—this proud woman of a proud race, pilloried before these folk who had known her from childhood, baring her soul to them.

"Something occurred," Nita brought out at last, "at the—Dwyer ball—and when we got home he said I had reached the end. He got out his big, sharp, cruel hunting-knife—I—ran screaming to Mammy's room. There was a hatchet on the hearth—before I knew what I was doing, I had snatched it up—and—I threw my arms over my eyes and—struck out!

"The next instant he tore the hatchet from my hand. Mammy screamed, and he fell. Then I started screaming too, I think. I did not look up. I had no need to. I knew what I had done. He had been too late—and the prophecy was fulfilled."

She broke down completely. Dr. Richard made her sit. I went at once to her, and somebody gave me a seat. There was a subdued hubbub all over the court-room.

The judge cleared his throat, brushed back his hair with a painful gesture, and pulled his sleeves carefully and exactly over his cuffs.

Randolph leaned on the attorney's table like an old man. I saw minutely as one does in big moments.

Mammy had tried to speak several times, and been silenced. Dr. Richard rose. "I wish to be sworn in," he said quietly. No objection was offered, and the oath was administered. Randolph looked as if nothing mattered now.

"I have had Mme. De Charleu in my sanatorium for several months past," said the doctor. "I have had her under close observation. Her confession comes as a complete surprise to me. But it is my intention to point out to the honorable court, and to you, gentlemen of the jury, that Mme. De Charleu has been caught and swept ruthlessly along by the most powerful force known to man—suggestion."

Again the fans stopped waving. There was a breathless hush. And Randolph looked up eagerly. I doubt if Nita heard him. She was weeping in my arms.

"For over a century," he continued, "the De Charleu family has been under the curse of insanity, the very root of which was suggestion. The Countess Marie, in dying, more than a century ago, promised that she would be avenged on her husband's house. This was the first suggestion! Then the nature of the gruesome deed carried with it the second suggestion of fantom hands that sought constantly to destroy the family.

"And the crime being committed against *a woman, a De Charleu, not of the blood*, in the first place, gives us the last link in this deadly chain of suggestion, which has been handed down from father to son, accumulating its own proof, gathering force generation after generation, and finally reaching its culmination in Amédée de Charleu."

He went on to speak briefly and authoritatively on the subject of thought as a great motive power, and particularly on the action of mind over mind, citing case after case to prove his premise. Strong men had been made ill by suggestion. There

was even one case on record which told of a death caused by suggestion pure and simple.

"The realization that he was the last of his line," the physician continued, "together with the old prophecy, undoubtedly fostered the seeds of insanity in De Charleu's mind. He, in turn, planted like seeds in Mammy's credulous, superstitious mind, and she naturally thought she saw the hands in Mme. de Charleu's cup. And so it was, that De Charleu's constant suggestion, backed up by Mammy's confirmation, preyed continuously on Mme. de Charleu's mind.

"This, together with her husband's threats, and her fear of him, was unquestionably sufficient to compass the tragedy the three of them had expected and dreaded. It was De Charleu himself who conceived his dreadful end; then by systematic reminder and accompanying threats, he pushed it toward fulfilment, and finally, at the point of a knife, drove his wife to the desperate consummation of his own suggestion!"

Dr. Richard sat down quietly, without question or objection from either side. Justification! But—

"Jedge, you shore is gwine to be sorry if you don't let me speak up! Mah baby done tole de prezactly truf, up to one p'int, and dat am where she say Mars' Amédée snatch de hatchet out of her hand. How she know who snatch dat hatchet when she got her arm over her eyes and ain't never look up?" She blurted this out before anybody could stop her. And Randolph at once put her on the stand again.

"Ah was soun' asleep," she said, "when mah baby come runnin' a 'screamin' to mah room, him after her full tilt wid dat big knife. Mah lamp was turned low. As Ah hit de flo' mah chile grab de hatchet and struck out at de air, and Ah snatch de hatchet away from her and let him have hit, just as he reach her. Ah tried to keep her out of hit. Dat's why I tole dat about de shirt, an' dat's all, an' hit's de Gawd's truf!"

Randolph and Nita looked at each other for the first time.

"Mah baby done run to me foh pertec-
tion, an' Ah perfected her," Mammy went
on. "Ah done sont dat debbil whah he
belong; an' de good Lawd doan' never pun-
ish nobody foh killin' a pizen snake; but
Ah reckon a jedge ain't 'spect to hab no
mussy, even if Ah is nuss him when he was
a baby."

"But doan' you believe hit, jedge, what
de fambly doctor say. He is a smart man,
but dey is things he don't know; and one
of 'em is dat de De Charleu's cuss is more
dan any congestion. It is a fac'. Ain't
mah folks always belong to de De Charleu's?
Don' dat make me a De Charleu—
but not of de blood? Well, den! Ain't
de cuss come true? An' Ah shore did see
dem hands in de cup, an' Ah thought dey
was Mis' Nita's. Ah mought hab knowed
better, cause dey was—black hands!"

For the space of a deep-drawn breath
there was dead silence.

When the judge's gavel finally brought
order, and both sides rested, he cleared his
throat and turned to the jury.

V.

A RELUCTANTLY sinking sun illumined Nita's lovely, tear-wet face as Randolph helped us into the family carriage. And out of the deeps of a weeping willow a mocking-bird sang his love-song in joyous abandon.

Mammy, sitting beside Uncle Jesse, nodded condescendingly to those of her color fortunate enough to get near her. Henceforth she would be a personage. She had been acquitted of the terrible charge of murder.

Looking into Randolph's eyes, I saw the dawn of a great hope. And as we drove away, far down the sun-flecked, shadow-dappled street, above the autumn clatter of metallic palms, and the laughter of folk to whom past tragedy is present romance, there came to us a weird, tuneless music—the muffled negro holler that is like no other sound in nature. It is the forest song of freedom from his savage ancestors.

And I echoed the suggestion that lay therein for Nita, last countess of the house of De Charleu.

"Jehannum" Smith

by
Gordon
McCreagh



I.

THE Hotel Oriental was unusually silent —no, not "unusually"; the word is misleading, because the thing happened every so often. Uneasily, perhaps, describes the prevalent air of expectation better.

Lithe, brown Hindu boys dressed in clinging white *chupkuns* slipped noiselessly about their business on their bare feet. White guests dressed in the coolest ducks or *tussur* silks lolled with their feet up on long-arm cane-chairs in the far end of the veranda and sipped pale yellow fizzy drinks libelously described as Scotch while they talked in low tones and smiled with understanding tolerance.

The hotel manager, a one-fifth Portuguese from Goa, who bore the proud name of Senhor Dom Roderigo Cardozo, peeped at intervals from one of the many curtained doorways and hoped for the best.

And all this because Jehannum Smith had come back. Not from the war—he had come back from that some little time ago. "Invalided out," though nobody could understand exactly why, for Smith was generally described as being the size of a door, and all his limbs were still where a lavish nature had placed them. There was some talk of shell-shock; but most people refused to believe that that kind of shell could be made.

Not that Smith was abnormally huge;

he wasn't more than a decent six feet or so by some two and a half wide. There was something about his face, rather, which had been carved by an unskilled workman out of red granite with an ax, which gave the impression of immensity and strength and domination. That, and his ideas, which on these occasions of his coming back were colossally magnificent.

All the Far East, for instance, remembered with joy the time when he had conceived the splendid notion that he was the Ameer of Afghanistan, and had gone forth to purchase the Y. W. C. A. as a suitable nucleus to his establishment.

This coming-back habit of Smith's needs an explanation. There would come periods into the great man's life when his soul seethed within him at the sameness of things and the taste of the world was as sawdust in his mouth. Then he would become restless as an elephant about to go *must*, and his fellow men would note the symptoms with uneasiness.

"Gorblimey," Smith would say presently, when the urge within him grew too puissant for mortal soul. "Strike me pink, but I got to go on a exploration or somethin'." And forthwith he would go.

His camp equipment consisted always of the same impedimenta: a half a dozen of whisky and a package of crackers. With these and his native boy he would disappear into the uncharted jungles. After the passage of days he would "come back"—

having all the crackers and none of the whisky!

Where he had been or how he had lived nobody ever knew. Sometimes tales would drift in from frightened villages of a portent in the land; but even the district commissioner could never get a word out of Smith.

His demeanor on these occasions was a vast and momentous solemnity, marked by an unblinking stare from wide, gray eyes, which were as devoid of all human expression as those of a long dead fish, and his speech consisted of the passionless consignment of all who addressed him to Jehannum—which is the colorful Oriental conception of the lowest of the hells.

Smith, then, had "come back," and the Hotel Oriental waited in anxious expectancy. Not that Smith was quarrelsome; far from it; but his mind on these prodigal home-comings was like the unaccountable grease on the fly-wheel. Nobody knew at what amazing tangent it might suddenly fly off. And it was always possible that Smith might have somewhere about him artillery suitable to his size.

Everybody remembered the joyous occasion when an offensively overbejeweled Bengali princeling, who had been educated at Eton—and was therefore, of course, quite the equal of the best white men, and better than most—had spoken in a proprietary way of some fluffy member of a pitiful traveling musical comedy show from Australia. The show, of course, was white; and the prince was—a raja!

Now, individual white men can never learn to regard these loose-lipped vaporings with equanimity. Governments somehow seem to think differently; and princes, whether of blue blood or brown, weigh heavily in the scales of those who sit in the high places. The group, therefore, seethed, but said nothing.

It was Smith who had risen with massive dignity, and with the sightless stare of a dead man had reached out a vast, slow hand and clutched the scion of royalty by a bunch of his embroidered vest while he announced his passionless determination.

"I'm goin' to pull all the arms an' legs an' things off'n you, an' then let you go!"

When an army had finally accumulated

and subdued the outraged white man before anything could happen which the official utterances could "deplore" as an "unfortunate incident," they had taken from Smith's person five revolvers of various large calibers—all of them unloaded!

It will be readily understood, then, why the Hotel Oriental watched and whispered and waited.

Smith sat now in the open veranda before his room, stiffly straight, with his thick forearms resting on the arms of his chair quite flat, like a sculptured Egyptian god, contemplating the vastness of nothing with the solemn impassiveness of the ages.

His boy slipped from behind the curtain, which was the only door to his room, and salaamed. It was apparent to the men in the far end of the veranda that he was making lengthy orations; but Smith sat like a stone god.

This native boy is worthy of mention. He was a Madrasi from Salapore, whose inherited cunning had shown him at an early age that it was a discreet and profitable maneuver to become a "curry-and-rice" Christian. That is to say, being without a job and devoid of money, he went to the local mission professing a vague unrest of the soul which was beyond his understanding. The good fathers joyfully embraced him, clothed him, fed him, taught him English—a very fearful tongue—and in due course baptized him, exchanging his patronymic of Poonoosawmi, relic of paganism, for the Christian name of Paul.

After which Paul gently faded from the ken of the mission; for he was now a member in good standing of an extensive series of clubhouses. By the simple expedient of going to a tin chapel, of which there are many in the land, he could obtain at any time food, shelter, clothing, if necessary—which was always. Having thus acquired a veneer—a very thin veneer—of the true religion, and adapted it to suit his inherited beliefs about godlings and devils, Poonoosawmi Paul had long ago lost the faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong; with one ineradicable exception—that whatever his master said and did and thought was right.

This exceptional boy, then, stood before

his master's chair and delivered himself of a quantity of the English which he had learned at the mission.

"Marshter, I telling true thing. This one verree high class gentleman; rupees he got like bug on damn nigger fellow's coat. From long distance—America—coming and tell only for see marshter."

Smith stared motionless into space for three full minutes. Then at last his lips moved as an oracle might speak.

"*Ow jehannum!*" he said without passion; which is good Arabic and comes from the same root as Gehenna.

The boy salaamed gratefully and pleaded further.

"But please, marshter, this feller making superior business talk. Plentee rupees you get."

Thus adjured, Smith remained rapt in the contemplation of a hazy infinite. The boy salaamed again and withdrew—but no further than behind the curtain of his master's room.

After a blankness of meditation which lasted an hour, some germ of an impression seemed to have made its way into the giant mind. Smith rose suddenly and made his way with the accuracy of a sleep-walker along certain corridors. Instantly his boy was at his heels, skilfully directing his steps; and presently he darted to the front and drew aside a curtain.

Within the room so unceremoniously invaded sat a gentleman whose first impression was cigar, whose second was fat gold chain, and whose third was ~~keen~~ business. The gentleman showed neither surprise nor annoyance at the invasion; he was used to the queerest-looking people in the world with the most staggering manners bursting into his presence unannounced. In fact, he was looking for such people; for he was a vaudeville manager.

Smith stood in the doorway and gazed at the man with wall-eyed gravity for three long minutes. Then he raised an unwavering finger at him.

"You go to 'ell!" he announced merrily; and he executed an about-face with military precision.

But the vaudeville man was accustomed to dealing with temperaments which were

very much more startling than Smith's; artistic temperaments had been one of his daily trials for many years, and he had a long experience in not letting a "find" get away from him.

He made a bound for the door, skilfully twisted his caller's maneuver into a complete turn, deftly piloted him into a chair, and with the grace of a conjurer produced a selection of cigars. Smith's astonishment at the swift efficiency of the gentleman from the other side was such that he stayed where he had been put. The genial one lit a cigar for himself, then another for Smith, and plunged into his business.

"Now, then, Mr. Smith, here's my proposition. I'm here looking for good head-line stuff; 'n I've heard a whole lot about this classy dancer who's making such a splash in some back-woods Hindu temple around here. Now back in the States we've had a raft o' phony princesses from the Jersey side who've got nothing except a good press agent; an' I'm ready to gamble that the genuine article properly handled will pull a high number in the three figures a week. How 'bout it?"

"Yuss," said Smith ponderously. "Ho yuss. Five 'undred rupees."

"Oh, sure," the manager agreed. "Only I'd make it dollars; and that's goin' some for a one-girl dance specialty these days. Now the way I dope it out, these temple janes are kinder prisoners, so to speak; their makin's goes to the management, an' all they get is their keep. So I'm figurin' that this queen will be tickled stiff to come to a free country where her salary is her own—of course, I'm entitled to a fair commission for my risk, an'—"

Smith interrupted him, solemnly weary of all this unnecessary talk.

"Five 'undred rupees I calls fair."

"Oh, I guess I'm entitled to more than that, Mr. Smith; all expenses, press stuff, railroading an' all that coming out o' my pocket. But she'll get a square deal from me; I'm no cheap John agent, I wanna tell you. Now, see here. If you'll take up this job I'll pay you your own figure an' expenses on the side. Whatever graft anybody's got to get is covered by—"

Once again Smith interrupted the voluble

agent. The glassy eyes had closed in the extremity of boredom; and with the shutting out of that codfish stare the hard-chiseled face suddenly stood out in all its rugged strength.

"Five 'undred rupees," came the monotonous murmur.

"Aw, say, now. Five hundred rupees is pretty steep for just expense money. But see here, I'll make a deal with you. All these poor pikers around here say they're scared to tackle the proposition, and they tell me that you know these Hindu ducks like a book, and if there's anybody who'll take on the job, you're the— Say, mister, are you—what th'—well, whadda ya know about that!"

The agent's voice trailed away in disgusted astonishment; for Smith had incontinently gone to sleep. Nor would all the agent's shouting wake him; and to lay hands on that massive figure struck the other as a gamble which was a little too precarious even for his irrepressible spirit.

For half an hour Smith remained like a dead thing, while the vaudeville man raved. Of all the queer characters he had met none had been as impossible as this.

Then suddenly Smith's eyes opened wide. Without a blink, without a suspicion of the daze which marks one who has just slept, without a word, he stood bolt upright on his feet and walked solemnly from the room.

As he reached his own quarters Poonoosawmi appeared from the veranda side of the curtain and busied himself about trivial nothings while his master gazed vacantly from the window. Presently the boy coughed gently in preparation, and his question showed that he had been listening.

Without shame he spoke; for why should there be any; was not his master's business also his?

"Marshter, you going ketchum this nautchni woman?"

His master's answer made up for its trifling inaccuracy by its staggering matter of factness.

"Yuss, me son. Five 'undred rupees we gets for the job. Three times the blighter tries to cut me down; but five 'undred I says resolute, an' I'll go yer, he says."

Poonoosawmi knew better than to argue

this statement; but he pleaded earnestly against his master's resolve.

"Oah, marshter, please. This bloody awful madness. Temple female is holy thing. All the time this man making steal away talk my liver is turning all into water. I am expert in all kinds of priests, marshter, and I telling you this Hindus is damn bad fellows. Vengeance in his catechism is *not* for the Lord's; it is for the priest craftiness; and their forgetfulness is *not*."

"Poonoosawmi," said Smith. "You shut up an' go to 'ell. Now it's this 'ere Malka Devi who does the hootch in this bloomin' old temple o' Mahadeo out on the Goobari Road that the gent wants, ain't it?"

"Yes, marshter, she is of most expensive beautifulness. But please, marshter, Mahadeo is verree powerful god; if he is angry he can turn all fellow into monkey."

"All right, me boy, I'll remember that," said Smith. "So now you run an' tell the bloke we'll bag the loot an' deliver to-morrow morning; an' he's to 'ave the *paisa* ready. Five 'undred, he said, an' not a *pais* less."

The boy knew that argument was futile. He bemoaned his master's madness, in which he had been so cheerfully included; but he sped to the room of the zealous vaudeville agent. To him he paraphrased his master's message.

"Sar, my marshter telling you damn fool for hell. Therefore to-morrow morning time he is putting girl in the bag and deliver loot for five-hundred rupees f. o. b. This much my marshter telling. But I telling you for safetyness: you take this female in the arm and run golly for hell in the ship. For priests is verree blood-curdling man; he is stabbing the belly, cutting the throat, he is putting arsenic in the rice; you one time *malakathwabi* dead."

Having delivered his message and his warning, Poonoosawmi salaamed deeply, and turned to dart from the door.

"Hey, wait a minute there," the astonished manager called. "Let me get this straight. You say your boss is going to grab off this queen? How's he propose to pull the stunt?"

"That knowledge, sar, is for my mysterious wondering. My marshter say

ketchum. All right; can do. What I know how can? My marshter is verree great man."

With that the loyal youth ducked out and hastened to be at his master's orders for the preparation and planning of the great coup. Mr. Smith reposed in a cane chair with his feet on the extended arms. His orders were:

"Boy, you hurry up an' bring me a whisky peg!"

That was Smith's last word for the rest of that day. His thoughts, if he had any, were hidden behind the mask of the idiosyncrasies attendant upon shell-shock. The vaudeville manager's high hopes sank with long leaps as each successive inquiry showed that Smith still sat in his chair with his eyes closed.

"Guess he's a four-flusher," he muttered in angry disgust. "Looks like it's up to me to round up some other attraction."

II.

YET, when the quick tropical night had fallen like a moist blanket over the land, two figures strode swiftly down the Goobari Road. From time to time they shrank aside into the dark teak jungle which fringed the highway, as parties of men, obviously late worshipers, advertised their coming from far ahead by the gleam of lanterns which served the double purpose of disclosing scorpions in the path and frightening away the devils in the tree-tops.

About a quarter of a mile from the temple of Mahadeo, the more massive of the two figures struck boldly into the jungle. The smaller followed; but it was plain that there was reluctance in his steps. He kept casting uneasy glances over his shoulder and upward as they passed under low-hanging boughs. He crossed himself devoutly and fingered a greasy scapular, which he always wore under his thin coat next to his skin.

He set great store by this scapular; for tightly sewn into its folds was a five-sided cylinder of pure iron which had been guaranteed by a yogi of great merit to drive away each of the five different kinds of *bhootis* which haunted the forest land.

Presently the smaller of the two marauders spoke.

"Marshter, how you grab this *nautchni* from inside?"

"How should I know?" his master grunted. "When we gets there somethin's bound to turn up."

He plunged on through the darkness till the jungle began to thin a little, and presently a high wall loomed before them. He grunted again and surveyed it for a long time in silence. It looked almost as though he slept standing. The boy broke in on his contemplation.

"Marshter, to-day — afternoon — what time you craftfully plotting I coming this temple for worship, the arranging whereof is thusly: Outside is wall. Middle side is outside court, inside court, holy place, and god's house. Surroundings is garden, priest's house, mango tope, tank, women's house, and what not."

"Well, I knows it," was his master's amazing' comment. "But Poonoosawmi, you're a jewel, says I. Therefore, sit you on the wall-top an' wait whilst I goes on a exploration."

He took the boy by the waist-band and hoisted him to his shoulder without an effort. Then with one hand under the soles of his feet he heaved him up like a weight-lifter, the boy clawing wildly at the wall the while, till presently he lay like a limp sack across its summit. But he quickly straddled the top and reached down a helping hand. Smith, however, drew back a few paces, made a quick rush and a superb leap, and his finger-tips just hooked over the coping.

It was all he needed. In a second he was sitting alongside of his servant and surveying the great enclosed square which was to be the scene of his coming depredation.

In the dim glow of the tropic starlight the various buildings were easy to distinguish through the lacy fretwork of the mango and orange trees. Far out to the front, near the road, lights flared smokily; and every now and then a gong banged and a conch-shell blared as some fanatical *shadu* assailed the demons which lurked ever with malicious intent about the holy places. Back by the rear wall everything was dim and silent.

"That thing females' quarter," Poonoo-

sawmi indicated. "But marshter, please. Sitting by my alone is a ghostly labor. For *bhoot* I got sacred amulet; but in presence of this Mahadeo fellow I am verree fearful man. Becoming riled, monkeys he can make."

"Ho, ken he? Well, me boy, there's a time when I has a argument with this 'ere same Mahadeo; an' I sloshes 'im in the belly with a coconut; an' a million o' priests comes yawpin' for to cut out me gizzard; an' I metagrobolizes 'em by battalions. But I ain't no monkey yet."

And with that the amazing man leaped like a vast ape to a perfectly impossible branch and was lost in the heavy shadows of its foliage. What wild adventure of his past lay behind that incident of the coconut, Poonoosawmi never knew; but he sat and waited in contentment, for his faith in his master was infinite. He saw him drop springily from a lower limb and melt into the darkness in the direction of the women's quarters.

The staggering thing about the whole proceeding was the sublime carelessness of the man. On that exalted soul such trivialities as preconceived plant or disguise had never impinged their troublesome presence. There he stood, a white man in a sacrosanct enclosure restricted to a fanatical creed where even governments did not venture to interfere.

But paltry considerations such as these never troubled that soaring spirit. If the thought came to him at all, it was immediately counterbalanced by the supreme conviction that whatever untoward thing might happen, something equally unexpected and astonishing would immediately happen to offset it.

He ambled on therefore in the dark till he came to the women's lines, a long, low barrack, removed quite a way from the rest of the temple buildings, just a series of single rooms, hardly more than cells, with a door in front and a grated window in the back. The doors opened out on a long veranda with a floor of stamped earth in which those unfortunate creatures who had been dedicated to the temple service cooked and ate and lived, and did everything, in fact, except sleep.

From most of the windows the wretched light from open *chirag* lamps threw flickering shafts which lined the barrack with a series of dim gun-ports.

With amazing directness Smith strolled along the rain-gutter and peeped into each window till he was satisfied that he had found the boudoir of the beauty whose fame had reached all the four corners of the land. None too softly he called her name.

In an instant the woman was alert. Intrigue is the life blood of the women of the Orient; and for most of them, penned up as they are, it is their only relaxation.

Smith spoke a low bazaar Hindustani with the fluency of a coolie. After twenty minutes' conversation with the girl her only anxiety was the hazard of escape.

"All that is necessary, O *nautchni*, is a thick pole wherewith to pry off the bars of thy prison," said Smith simply; and thereupon he shoved his hands comfortably into his pockets and strolled off with the fixed idea of finding a pole somewhere about the grounds in the dark.

There was no slinking, no crouching behind trees. Somewhere against the walls, Smith knew, there would be a lean-to or a shed containing garden tools; and he began a leisurely exploration with the directness of a man going about his legitimate business.

Fortunately the far walls were, of course, deserted. Quite fortunately again the dilapidated outline of a lean-to bulked presently ahead. Smith found himself treading in a sand path, and he strode forward with eagerness.

Then three figures drifted silently out of the dimness in front of him.

They were dressed in a single robe of dingy muslin which encircled the waist with certain prescribed folds and draped the loose-flowing end over the shoulders. It was their only garment. Even in the dark they were instantly recognizable as priests of Mahadeo. They stopped in surprise at the crunching of boots on the sand.

"*Kaun hai?* Who is there?" one of them called.

Smith stared in their direction. Slowly his head lowered like a bull's, and he swelled with indignation at their interruption. Then:

"You—you go to 'ell!" he growled.

The priests came forward, wondering at this strange greeting, and peered at the queer figure which wandered in their gardens. For a few minutes the reality of the horrible happening was unable to impress itself on their brains. The thing was too inconceivable.

That a non-Hindu should defile the interior of a temple was unthinkable enough; but a Christian and a white man! So frightful a sacrilege just could not happen, that was all. Yet it stood there and growled at them.

Their eyes began to open wide in fanatical rage. The first instinct of a native when surprised in any way is to yell like a siren horn. The foremost of the priests opened his mouth, and then Smith, with a sudden spring, clutched all three of them in a vast anaconda embrace. For crucial minutes the four shapes merged into a single swaying bulk in the darkness; the priests struggling to yell for help, and Smith straining all his gigantic muscles to choke them to silence.

His great arms, long as they were, could not surround all three, of course, but their loose robes which offered such a satisfactory grip helped wonderfully. The best that the panting three could accomplish was a choking squawk from time to time which Smith discouraged by a tighter squeeze.

But at last the great fellow got the hold which he had been trying for. He settled himself and tightened his grip. Then, like a hammer-thrower, he grunted with sudden effort and put all the strength of his swelling muscles into a whirling heave. Limbs flew up in the air, billowy robes spun in serpentine curves, and the whole straining mass thudded together to the sand.

Smith possessed a fist of the size and consistency of a paving-stone. Where it fell there followed silence. Three times in lightning-quick succession it dropped; and then Smith sat up and scooped the sand from the back of his neck.

"Gorblimey!" he panted. "Nerve o' the bloomin' 'eathen! But, so 'elp me, I only socked 'em knockouts; I ain't killed a one o' the three—I don't think. They'll come around in about 'arf an hour an' 'owl ruddy murder."

With slow deliberation he felt for a head in the dark, and finding one, dragged it with easy confidence across his lap and gagged it most efficiently with strips of its own garment. The other two he served the same, and grunted his satisfaction.

Then, as he contemplated his handiwork, a quaint conceit came to him. He considered it gravely; and with consideration its allure grew. With sober seriousness he rolled the inert forms out of their robes, laid them carefully side by side like sardines, and then rolled them into a single huge bundle which he folded over and knotted and tied with elaborate care.

"I'll drop 'em down a bloomin' well somewhere," he murmured. So appropriate a disposition was eminently satisfactory. But Smith was never one to spoil the contemplation of a noble idea by haste. Why should time or place be permitted to interfere?

He grunted, therefore, arranged himself comfortably against the bundle, and drew from his pocket a flask of unusual size.

"Cheer-o," he said, and he drank a health to himself in celebration of his victory.

The bundle was softly comfortable. Smith wriggled his great shoulders to dispose of sundry protruding lumps to better advantage, and pondered with earnest importance over the captives of his prowess. Their uncalled for interference with his plans irritated him, and he grumbled petulantly to himself.

"Sanguinary niggers! I'll—bloomin' well shove 'em in a—bloomin' well. S'welp me, I will."

Smith's virtuous indignation grew with reflection. So ungentlemanly a meddling with his vast plans was unendurable, and his racing imagination launched itself into a pleasant contemplation of yet vaster plans for the utter immolation of the obtrusive three. His original quest and the appalling risk of his present situation drifted back into a dim insignificance before the absorbing contemplation of various fantastic forms of retribution.

It was only by the grace of the red gods of Shamgar, whose peculiar province it is to look after all true adventurers, that the whole thing had happened in the most de-

serted part of the gardens. Smith's reminder of the stern necessities of life, therefore, was not through the searing agony of a long knife-blade under the ribs. But he was constrained none the less to leap suddenly into wide-eyed vigilance.

A stealthy scuffling in the branches above had disturbed him. He turned just in time to see a dim shape hang for a moment in black silhouette against the sky and then drop full thirty feet from a great limb to the ground and crouch facing him.

He was on his feet in an instant, with legs wide apart, evenly balanced in alert readiness for whatever might happen. The shape rose to its feet and advanced warily toward him.

It was about a foot shorter than Smith; but then again it was about a foot wider. It looked in the darkness like a horribly formidable antagonist. Smith quietly lowered one of his knotty arms and drew it back in preparation for an annihilating drive. Without a sign of fear, the shadowy figure shuffled nearer.

“Krik-krik-krr-ee-eek,” it said in a high-pitched voice.

It was Smith who leaped back, five feet out of reach, and landed on the balls of his feet in his exact original defensive position. The burly shape advanced again, swinging a long arm just as Smith did, and chattering inquiringly at him.

Then Smith's tense breath escaped from him in a windy explosion, and his great bunched shoulder-muscles relaxed. He pointed a sudden finger at the huge bulk.

“I know who you are,” he muttered accusingly. “You're a bloomin' 'carnation.”

The figure reached out with astonishing length to take hold of the finger which pointed at him and krikked again.

“Yuss, you're a bloomin' 'carnation o' Hanuman, that's what you are. An' you're god of all the bloomin' monkeys in the world; and you got a shrine somewhere in 'ere.”

The great ape chattered softly and snuggled nearer. It was obviously quite tame and entirely unafraid; since, quite apart from its vast strength, nobody would ever have dared to molest it on account of its extreme sanctity.

For Hanuman had long ago been elevated to the godhead in reward for his services in helping the great god, Rama, to get his wife, Sita, back from the hundred-eyed demon, Ravana, who had kidnaped her.

“Blimey, ain't 'e friendly?” muttered Smith, and as he felt the creature's huge arms, “Golly, but I'm glad I ain't 'ad to fight 'im.”

Then reminiscently, almost regretfully, “I ain't never 'ad a fight with a god—only with a coconut.” And after a ruminating pause, with inspiration, “Nor I ain't neither ever 'ad a drink with a god!”

No sooner conceived than acted upon. Smith produced his abnormal flask and took a long draft.

“Ere's to yer, Hanuman Ji.” He wiped the bottle politely to make up for his rudeness in drinking first and handed it to the ape. “'Ave a nip yerself, old sport.”

The great brute smelled at the bottle and then tilted it awkwardly to its mouth. It coughed and spat as the fiery stuff burned its throat, but it smacked its lips over the after aroma.

“Crickey, 'e done it!” murmured Smith in awe. “The beggar's human! 'Ere, don't swig the 'ole blarsted lot! 'Ere, gimme it!”

He rescued the flask from the big brute and stood in wondering cogitation of the unusual honor which had come to him in drinking with one of the most revered of the Hindu pantheon. Then a sublime and magnificent conception formed itself in his brain. He pointed a thick finger once more.

“Hanuman,” he uttered solemnly, “you're a good sport. An' I'll tell you what: I'm goin' to make a offerin' to you. Yuss, that's what I'm goin' to do; a bloomin' offerin'. Three priests I got what I can't use—an' I'm goin' to give 'em to you! Now you show me your little private shrine 'ere an' I'll bring 'em right along. An' maybe you got a pole or something that I can use for a little job I got on hand.”

The noble idea was worthy of Smith in his most exalted moments. He stooped to his great bundle of humans and up-ended it like a great roll of bedding. It wriggled slightly, but Smith only grunted. Then he turned his back to it, reaching behind over his head, squatted for an instant, and with

a heave he hoisted the weight on to his wide shoulder and staggered to his feet.

"Come on," he grunted, and he stepped heavily out toward the central group of buildings. The ape shuffled and swung beside him.

In a Hindu temple there are always a number of niches and lesser shrines built into and out from the jutting angles of the outer wall. Smoky *chirag* lamps burned before most of these; but the danger of light never entered Smith's mind. Priests could be seen further out toward the main entrance, but round to the rear nobody paid any attention to the two dimly lit figures. Smith passed one or two minor shrines with scorn. Then a more pretentious one faced him. Before this was a little court paved with red bricks, and within, through the dimness loomed a grotesque idol. Smith was satisfied.

"Ho, I guess this is it," he grunted. "Any'ow, it 'll do." And he dumped his bundle to the pavement and rolled it in through the doorway. He stood in the entrance and stared emptily at the pot-bellied deity.

"Funny lookin' duck. Arms an' legs like a blinkin' centiped. If I 'ad that a many I'd—"

Smith's cogitation was suddenly cut short by a howl of astonished rage. A group of priests in silent bare feet had come round the corner and stood looking at the desecration with fanatical horror.

Smith had long ago absorbed the axiom that the most efficient defense was offense. With an instant's glare to take in the situation he rushed at the crowd and essayed to crush them all at once. In a second he was the center of a clawing, shouting maelstrom of whirling arms, legs, and robes.

The ape leaped up and down on all fours and whooped with excitement. Smith, with wide-spread legs, stood like a huge bear which the hounds were trying to pull down. Every now and then a mighty buffet of his got home, and there was one less priest to claw at him.

But more came running from around the corner and immediately added their yells and efforts to the original pack. The crowd in their clinging robes hampered one an-

other; but presently a knife flickered in the smoky light, and then another.

Smith seized a lean priest of small stature by the neck and thrust him, choking this way and that as a shield, while he swung a right arm like a derrick-beam. Wherever it fell there fell also a priest. The mob surged against that defense like billows.

Then a man with a copper-bound *lathi*, or quarter staff, of bamboo forced his way to the center and swung at Smith. The hard-beset giant lifted his shield to the blow and crouched swiftly under it, and the man went down limp. Smith grabbed into the crowd for another shield, while the *lathial* struck again. This time the blow fell on the shoulder of the leaping ape.

From such as saw it a gasp of horror went up; and from Smith a shout of exhilaration. For in an instant he had an ally who was worth ten men.

With a coughing shriek of rage the great ape leaped out at the crowd, all tearing hands and clutching feet and frightful crushing jaws. Smith whooped with the creature and smashed a knotty bunch of knuckles at the chest of the man with the staff. The blow would have stayed in a barrel. The man's knees crumpled and he went down clutching at two of his fellows.

Instantly Smith snatched at the staff and whirled it up with a shout. He held it in the middle in one immense hand, and plied both ends after the good old method of his far back ancestors. In a very few minutes he stood alone in the center of a respected circle, and stepped on groaning bodies as he fought forward.

A little distance off the frenzied ape, at whom none dared to strike back, was a clawing, shrieking demon of venom and fight, a swift-leaping menace to which none of the priests, fanatic though they were, cared to turn their backs.

In this Heaven-sent respite a gleam of sanity came to Smith. As usual he acted on it without a second's consideration. With a final shout he rushed at two priests who still faced him rather than the ape, bowled them over like ninepins, and then, shamelessly leaving the giant monkey to finish the fight into which he had led it, he turned and dashed off into the darkness.

The priests were so occupied with their ferocious god that the few who noted Smith's flight had no stomach for following that crazy Hercules into the darkness under the trees. Many minutes would have to elapse before an armed pursuit with lanterns could be organized. But of minutes Smith needed only a few for the work he had in hand.

Having acquired the pole, the lever which he had set out to get, his mind reverted inflexibly to the job he had come to accomplish.

It was hardly an effort for him to insert the heavy bamboo under the grating of the fair dancer's prison and to apply one of his massive shoulders to the other end. The whole grating tore its way out of the wall, bringing with it an avalanche of soft bricks and cement.

In a few seconds the girl was dragged through the jagged opening, squeaking with terror and pain. Smith bundled her in her voluminous garments, tucked her under one arm, and raced for the wall.

The faithful Poonoosawmi sat where he had been stationed, counting off urgent prayers to a long list of queer gods on his rosary beads and quaking at the sounds of strife which came from the direction of the light glow. He squealed joyously as the crunch of running feet came over the leaves and his master's form loomed in the shadow beneath him.

"'Ere, ketch 'old an' 'ang on!" panted Smith.

He spread his feet wide to get a good purchase, swung his bundle of cloth gently once or twice to get the heft of it, and then heaved it upward with all the strength of his great shoulders and loins.

Poonoosawmi on the coping grabbed and clutched at the billows of cloth and hung on desperately as he was bid; and in another second Smith himself sat astride the wall and lifted the bundle easily to his lap. In a few more moments their footsteps died away in the blessed sheltering darkness of the jungle.

III.

IT was morning, seven o'clock, and the Hotel Oriental was thinking of getting up

for breakfast. A closed match-box sort of native carriage rattled up to the door. A white man and a brown man and a heavily wrapped figure slipped out and hurried into the hotel.

The vaudeville man was, as usual, quite unmoved by the hurried entry of the three. Smith stood with feet apart like a colossus, and pointed with a magnificent gesture to the veiled loveliness.

"There's your Malka Devi. An' my tip to you is to grab 'er an' then take a train as fast as you knows 'ow—after 'andin' over five 'undred rupees."

The agent sprang up with an exclamation.

"By golly, you got her! Man, you're a genius! But say, hold on! I got to see her first, ain't I?"

The girl needed no persuading to show her beauty which had allured so many to this man who was going to take her to a land of affluence and freedom. Veils slipped from her like the famous dance of the seven; and presently she stood forth in all her glory—a middle-aged, rather stout, and dusky lady, of form and features which, while they suited the Oriental conception perfectly, could never have measured up to the standard of a Ziegfeld chorus.

The manager's face turned grayish, and he gasped.

"Gosh! Say, mister, did—are you sure you got the right one?"

"Sure? Suttinly! Arsk 'er yourself."

"Holy gee! Say, I'd—I'd expected a sort of a show-baby—broonette, of course; but with a good make-up I figured she'd—gee whillikens! But maybe she's got the fancy steps. Tell her to do a turn."

Smith translated. Nothing loath, she began to weave her arms in and out, and shuffled her feet and beat time with her anklets.

The manager sat down heavily.

"Holy Mike! It's the hootch! A couple new shakes maybe; but it's the good old Coney Island cootchie dance. Gosh-a-mighty! Say, is that all there is to a temple dance?"

"No, sir," said Smith. "There's more to it—heaps more—if you ain't modest."

"Oh, golly no!" yapped the manager.

"Say, mister, I can't handle this for a

minute. Why, if I sprung that stuff on an American stage I'd be mobbed first and pinched after. No, sirree; this ain't what I figured on, and I call the deal off. You take her away, mister. I can't do anything with this act."

It was Smith's turn to sit down heavily.

"Gawds!" he murmured. "This 'ere is a descent from the sublimey to the gorblimey!"

Poonoosawmi with keen business instinct chimed in:

"Sar, you don't wanting for pay five hundred rupees?"

"Five hundred rupees!" The manager almost shrieked. "Say, I couldn't stage that for fifteer a week! No, sirree, the deal is off, I tell you. Why, I just hired a troupe of performing goats that's a better drawing-card. No, sir. You take her right away before her owners arrive and commence to carve up the landscape."

So cold-bloodedly irresponsible a repudiation was quite a shock. But then that is the way of vaudeville managers.

Smith was never a man to haggle. He rose majestically and strode from the room. Poonoosawmi followed with the wondering woman. The shock, however, after all the frightful risks he had taken, was sufficient to call for a bracer. Smith was never a man who hesitated over bracers. He took one—in proportion commensurate to the shock. The measure of the bracer showed how powerful the shock had really been.

Then Smith sat back in his long-armed cane chair to consider the problem. After staring into the void for some minutes, he propounded the question to his servant.

"Poonoosawmi, what're you goin' to do with the girl now you've got her?"

Poonoosawmi was quite unmoved by this sudden responsibility thrust upon him.

"I don't knowing, marshter. I think maybe putting in *ticca gharry* and telling drive like hell for temple."

"Poonoosawmi, you're a fool," said his master, nodding wisely and pointing the accusing finger. "She won't go; she was too bally pleased to get out."

"Then I am at losses," said the servant. "And speeding is needful, for this priest fellows soon coming and making bobbery."

"All right," quoth Smith with awesome seriousness. "You tell 'em to go to 'ell—an' you go, too." Came a long pause with closed eyes, then: "An' take 'er with you." The last was a dreamy murmur, and in the next instant Smith slept with the untroubled peacefulness of a child.

IV.

HE woke with his usual wide-eyed alertness. Two hours had passed, but there had been no cataclysm of battle and murder and sudden death. The boy stood exactly where he had been. The only difference was that the girl had gone, and a coarse gunny sack lay on the table.

Smith's eyes always took in everything in a flash—habit born of necessity.

"What's that there?" he demanded.

Poonoosawmi grinned all over.

"This, marshter, is rupees."

"What! 'As the geezer changed 'is blinkin' mind?'"

"No, marshter, I taking woman like you tell."

Smith's vague recollection of his last orders was sufficient cause for mystification.

"Where? To—to 'ell?"

"Oah, no, marshter, how can? I take to one Armenian fellow in bazaar; one verree low fellow, marshter; he agent for matrimonial of Nawab of Dacca—that one Mohammedan swine, two-three dozen he got. Five hundred rupees price I sell, and agent is paying with leaps; temple trained female of muscular contortions is verree valuable, marshter."

For the first time in his life Smith was overcome with astonishment. He sat back, eyes closing and opening in spasmodic jerks.

"Strike—me—pink!" he muttered. "An' what 'd she say?"

Poonoosawmi's grin went all the way round to the back of his head.

"She plentee tickling, marshter. She give me one ring for *bakshish*. Look see!"

And he lifted a dusty, horny foot and displayed a half-carat ruby shining from the grime of his middle toe.

"Gorblimey!" murmured Smith, and consciousness drifted softly from him, and he slept the sleep of the just.

Green Spiders

by Alfred D. Pettibone

Author of "The Yellow Furlough," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

APPEARANTLY the sole survivor of the ill-fated Irene Statler, Dr. Vawter told an amazing story to his fellow travelers in a Pullman smoking compartment, including, among others, a coarse seaman and Arthur Westcott, whose fiancée, Dorothy Gaylord, had been the only girl aboard the vessel. Following the murder of Captain Jessup, Vawter stated, and the finding of two huge green spiders under his berth, suspicion passed from Letcher, a naturalist, to Ulmquist, the carpenter, and then to the reserved and quiet Falkens. Mankus, the mate, a hairy brute, who had suddenly begun to drink heavily following Jessup's death, was now in charge, and the rivalry for the girl's favor between him and Letcher became acute, now that the captain was out of the running. As a result of an impromptu investigation Ulmquist was put in irons, Mankus killed a mutinous sailor, and the very air seemed filled with menace.

For suddenly one evening when they were sitting in the saloon the lights went out, something or some one rushed from the captain's stateroom, and a terrific struggle ensued in the darkness, in which the chief engineer was killed. The crew had mutinied, stolen and consumed a quantity of wood alcohol, and, with Mankus a prisoner, began a wild debauch, during which Vawter, fearing for Dorothy, and going aft for the captain's pistol, was knocked out by the blow of some unseen assailant. When he came to he found the ship driving upon a rocky coast, and with the crash again lost consciousness, and recovering, found the ship strangely silent and deserted.

When Vawter's strength was somewhat restored, he made shift to reach shore by means of a small boat, which was wrecked in the passage; then, from a cliff-edge, through his glasses, he saw several figures on deck, one of whom he made out as Mankus. Reaching the ship by means of a ladder of vines and a short swim from the cliff's foot, he was just in time to see Mankus advancing on Dorothy with outstretched arms. Mankus caught Dorothy about the waist with both hairy arms, and forced her brutally to him just as Vawter reached the rail.

CHAPTER VII.

PRISONERS OF THE TIDE.

"HANDS off!" I exclaimed, raising my club threateningly as I sprang toward him.

At this unlooked-for interruption Dorothy started, glanced at me and turned pale. Mankus released her with one arm and swung round with a look half startled, half angry, evidently prepared to defend his rights against all comers in the flesh. But as his fish eyes took in the situation his arms dropped to his sides, his great jaw sagged, he recoiled and his face paled.

"Wha—wha—" he gasped, but his legs wabbled beneath him and his lips worked convulsively.

"If you touch this girl again, I'll kill you!" I repeated, advancing toward him.

"Wha—wha—who?" he whimpered, and clutched the rail unsteadily. "Mother o' God! Where'd ye come from?" he finally gasped.

"From the ocean. I'll always be near at hand to protect Miss Gaylord against you. Understand that."

Mankus had now come to the sage conclusion that I was not a ghost, but he showed no fight.

"The sawbones," muttered huskily, wiping his parched lips with the back of a hand. "That you, doc—are you alive?"

"Very much so," I returned satirically.

"Well, that's different again. But ye ain't a fooling me, are ye, doc?" he de-

This story began in The Argosy for March 22.

manded suspiciously. "No? Well, that's different, too. Alive—and hearty! That's the answer to *that* question. That there's the answer to *that* question."

Why he considered it necessary to assure us repeatedly of this obvious fact he did not enlighten us, but continued:

"Well, that's different again. Alive! Thought ye was dead, doc. Now, on my soul I thought ye was—but glad to see ye, sure. Glad to see ye back agin, even if ye did interrupt a little queenin' match I'd been a laying plans fer, fer some time. Next time don't butt in so 'bruptly. Send in yer card—"

"You heard what I said!" I exclaimed angrily. "Now leave us!"

Mankus drew himself up at this and squared his shoulders, but the sight of the club in my hand pacified him.

"Well, doc," he drawled, "I guess I ain't got no quarrel with ye. An' you ain't got no quarrel with me—as I figger. I got rights to this little gal as much as you; more, the way she's been a stringin' an' a playin' me—"

I strode toward him and he retreated a step.

"All right, doc, steady there. The voice with the smile wins. I'm a goin' to leave ye. But I'll tell ye somethin'. Ye ain't seen the soft looks this gal give me all along. It's the way with the sex to pretend one thing—but she's mine and I say hands off. If ye knowed what *I* know—but doc, I thought ye was dead. An' now ye're alive—that's the answer to *that* question. I guess I'll go for'ard an' see how the grub's a comin' along, but I ain't through yet—mind that."

With that he swept off his cap to each of us in turn and swaggered forward to the alleyway.

Till now Dorothy had spoken no word. I saw that her pallor still remained, but whether because startled at my sudden rise from the grave or because of the ordeal through which she had just passed, I could not at once determine. Her sweet eyes glowed with wonder and thankfulness as I crushed her little hands in mine.

I briefly outlined my adventures as we walked slowly forward and she told me that

Falkens and George Letcher had gone off in the boat early in the afternoon. They should have returned long before now. Her father, Mankus, and herself were alone on the ship.

As soon as I changed my clothes Dorothy announced we would wait dinner no longer; the three of us sat at the table, and I learned from Dorothy's lips what had befallen them.

It will be remembered that I left Falkens and Letcher crouching in the alleyway opposite the saloon just at the critical moment when some of the crew were getting ready to batter in the door of Dorothy's stateroom. It was my intention to get the dead skipper's gun from the aft-hatch in time to reenforce Falkens and Letcher in their plan of attempting a rescue.

Poggio, now half drunk, was the leader of those who wished to break down the door, but the brute Ulmquist, soberer and planning to save the girl for himself, objected; the men fell to parleying while others began shooting craps and brawling.

Poggio's hot Southern blood did not long brook Ulmquist's dictatorship, and when the latter rose from his chair at the head of the table and left the saloon, Poggio seized this opportunity to put his designs into execution.

One of his retainers, a Malay of crossed blood, swaggered toward Dorothy's door with the intention of forcing it, but he had taken only three steps when his swarthy face convulsed spasmodically. After writhing a few moments apparently in great agony, he fell to the floor.

Most of his companions thought he was ridiculously going through some marriage rite according to the custom of his particular jungle, and they roared heartily at his ludicrous pantomime. But in the midst of their merriment one of the white stokers who had gone below came shrieking, dashing, lunging into the saloon, tearing out his hair by the roots and striking his belly; his wild course and staring eyes showed that he was stone blind. Stumbling against Ulmquist's empty chair, he fell to the rug, writhing and frothing at the mouth.

A third man, a Portuguese with a strain

of Malay blood, dashed shrieking across the 'tween-decks and with an insane cry jumped overboard. Two more of Poggio's men in the saloon were stricken with nausea. At these additional sounds of commotion the negro, Tack, came bounding up on deck, shouting:

"The h'ant! The h'ant! A hoodoo ship!"

A series of wild shrieks below and aft showed that the "hoodoo" was working elsewhere. Some of the men were overtaken with convulsions and died in the fo'c'sle. Others died in the saloon, on the 'tween-decks, or jumped overboard. Pandemonium seemed to have broken loose. One of the mortally stricken machinists yelled desperately, despairingly for the doctor.

"It's p'ison, I say! Fetch the sawbones, fer the love of God!"

"He can't help you!" bawled some one. "He's croaked an' overboard—an' God, too!"

"A hoodoo ship! A hoodoo ship!" shouted Tack, rolling his eyes terribly, and others took up the cry. Meanwhile Falkens took the opportunity to slip down to the brig and release Mate Mankus, who concealed himself in Jessup's cabin and locked the door.

By morning the extent of the havoc was ascertained. It was even more devastating than had been feared. The only survivors among the crew were Ulmquist, Poggio, Omura, Tack, and two other negroes, one engineer stone blind, and five Portuguese-Malays. The two negroes and the majority of the Malays were sleeping off the effect of their potations. There were only two men in the engine-room and Ulmquist himself had to take his trick at the wheel.

In the night Letcher had succeeded in getting a knife from a dead stoker, but Falkens failed to get one of the guns, for the crafty Ulmquist took them all as soon as their owners were stricken, and Poggio, partly sobered by the disaster, threw the extra knives overboard.

A new situation had to be faced at once. The ship was terribly short-handed and her engines were left to the mercy of unskilled men. Ulmquist, the most capable sailor of

the lot, was frankly unfitted to cope with the situation and in addition now lived in mortal terror of the hoodoo. Frenzied and panic-stricken, he crowded all the steam on the ship he could make, held a course southwest, and gave orders to run for the first land that should be sighted.

Ever since the storm the Irene had been leaking a little, but practically no work had been done at the pumps since Jessup's death, and the ship settled lower and lower. Ulmquist piped all hands to the pumps, but at the end of two hours' work the depth of water in the well showed an actual increase.

It was too late to save the ship. The outlook seemed desperate. Night came on again, and the crew lacked the courage to face it. The cry of "Land ahead!" did not mend matters, for it soon became only too evident that the Irene was running full tilt before a strong wind toward a line of unbroken cliffs, which were unrelieved by lights either stationary or revolving.

No effort was made by Ulmquist to change his course or reverse engines. It was as if he and his crew had gazed with horror at the Fata Morgana, that dread reincarnation of many forms, which beckons sailors to their destruction.

There came a sudden lull in the wind. The long heave and thrust of the swell had subsided to comparative calm, and the ship, deprived for the moment of the impulse of the wind, lost way for a space, coming almost to a full stop, as if in the grip of some powerful current making from the shore. Her engines, laboring against the sluggishness of the ship herself, seemed all at once to slacken speed. It was now or never. A veritable frenzy now possessed them. The best life-boat was lowered with mad haste, and every man jack of them, including Omura and his dictionary, tumbled into it and rowed desperately away.

Mankus now came out of his hiding-place, took in the situation, and with the help of Falkens and George Letcher lowered a second boat. The Irene was so low in the water, the roar of the breakers so loud and terrifying, and the tall black cliffs were so near that Mankus grew alarmed and would not take the time to stock the

boat with adequate provisions. Daniel Gaylord was helped into the boat, followed by his daughter, and the five of them were soon clear of the ship and rowing away from the cliffs.

With the departure of all hands the wind again rose; the ship, like a thing alive, with wheel lashed, lights blazing fore and aft, and engines going full tilt once more, steamed straight toward the cliff, but instead of being dashed to pieces and sinking before their eyes she was suddenly swallowed up, hull, deck-house, stacks, and lights quite as if she never had been; she seemed a fantom ship, indeed.

All exclaimed with horror at this inexplicable phenomenon. The three rowers redoubled their efforts to combat both wind and current, and upon gaining some half mile of distance from the cliffs they directed their course westward. At length they succeeded in making a landing on the lee shore of a small promontory, and here they passed the night.

In the morning the sea was still running. They did not dare venture out in the boat. Falkens and Mankus devoted the day in an effort to reach the top of the cliffs but failed. They learned, however, that Ulmquist's gang had landed about a mile further west, on a palm-lined beach. For the next two days the high wind obtained. The scanty provisions and the single keg of water began to run short. There were no fruit trees except betel-palms near this barren part of the coast.

The sailors, too, were having their troubles, for about noon Ulmquist and the largest of the negroes came over to borrow a box of matches. Falkens gave him some matches and asked for a sack of potatoes. Ulmquist laughed his hoarse laugh and said he would take the question under advisement. Then he said he would give them the potatoes if "the little leddy, ma'am" would return with him to his camp and select the ones she wished.

Of course this offer was promptly declined and Ulmquist, remarking that he would see her again when she "war'n't too high-toned and too high-brow" to talk to him, took his colored retainer and returned to his men.

The few crabs and shell-fish on the beach were not enough to sustain life; all were agreed it would be most unwise to have further dealings with Ulmquist and his precious crew; and the following morning, the sea being rather calmer, they embarked before daylight and rowed back along the cliff to find a more fertile country.

Upon rounding a projecting lip of rock they were hugely surprised to find a deep inlet. This they entered forthwith, with the result that by 9 A.M. they were all safely back aboard the Irene. From the signs in saloon and galley it was evident that the ship had been visited in their absence and they concluded that some of Ulmquist's gang must have come for food and water.

Daniel Gaylord was delighted to reach the ship again. Rapidly recovering his health he vowed he now had enough material to write seven novels, the first of which he meant to begin work on at once.

Falkens, however, was restless. Upon him seemed to devolve the responsibility, and he realized the necessity, of reaching the high ground of the island to determine if it were inhabited, learn its resources, and take steps looking toward an escape.

Accordingly, shortly after lunch he and George Letcher took the boat and rowed away. They were now three hours overdue and every one was feeling anxious.

Such, then, was the brief narrative of what had befallen ship, passengers and crew from the moment I was struck on the head and knocked into the hatch till the present time.

"Well, sawbones," said Mankus, who had now joined us at dinner and was busily picking his teeth with a sharpened match, "that there's the answer to *that* question. An' all along we thought ye was croaked an' overboard. But instead ye was a layin' in the cabbitch crate down in the aft-hatch, whicht was different agin. Who'd 'a' thunk it? Why, I never heerd o' sitcha think, doc!"

Having now reduced the end of the match to pulp he spit it out and inserted in his mouth five sticks of chewing-gum one after the other before he continued:

"No, sirree! I guess I never heerd o' sitch a think! An' who do ye guess rapped ye on the dome, doc? Ye must 'a' see his face or arm or suthin'."

"No," said I. "It was too dark."

"It couldn't 'a' been the hoodoo now, eh?" he suggested, digging the head of a match into his ear and twisting it with a look of ineffable relief. "I alwuz like to know the answer to that question. Nit! The hoodoo would 'a' made a clean job of it, like it foxed the skipper. Besides, I ain't taking stock in that there hoodoo. That's fo'c'sle talk. That's an excuse of them ignorant swabs of loafers when they gets tired of a ship. Then who was it rapped ye on the dome, doc? Why, I tell ye, that skunk Ul'quist. It was him done it an' croaked the skipper, too."

Daniel Gaylord, who had been growing very restless, took this opportunity to leave us. Mankus was now absent-mindedly picking his teeth with the match that he had put in his ear, and Dorothy turned away and started to go on deck.

"Are ye worried, Miss Dor'thy, over the absent heroes?" called Mankus. "Aw shucks! no need to git so all-fired anxious over the likes o' them. Is it Falkens or George Bug-ketcher yer purtendin' ye've tooken a fancy to now?"

Dorothy had already left the saloon and did not hear this last remark.

"Wouldn't it beat ye, doc, wouldn't it beat ye?" exclaimed Mankus, turning to me. "The way a female plays off one man ag'in' another. It does 'em good to git worried an' weep over them that's absent while spittin' on them that's under their nose! That's the female of it."

"Now, if *I* was absent instead o' them she'd be a straining her two eyes down channel jist the same, her little heart a going like a donkey injine and a bouncin' in her bosum at every ripple o' brine. She'd crowd on full steam ahead and run after me, but if she was to sight my stacks or masthead light she'd back water an' ware off, a showin' as cool a pair o' heels as ye please. Doc, females is like boats; they don't savvy where they're a goin' nor why unless there's a man at the wheel."

We now heard the welcome splash of

brine astern, the rhythmic gurgle of water, and the hiss of foam as if the life-boat were returning, but though we listened we could not detect the creak of oar-locks, the drip of blades on being lifted from the water, nor the rippling sound of a prow cutting a rapid path up the channel.

"That's funny," observed Mankus as we strolled out and joined Dorothy on the after-deck. "That don't sound like no ship's boat." He pulled at his lip nervously. "But I guess it must be them, all right."

We strained our eyes into the darkness, but could see nothing.

"Perhaps it's the echo we hear," I suggested.

"Sure! that's the answer to *that* question," returned Mankus gruffly, but there was an uneasy note in his voice. One huge hand stole toward the revolver that Falkens had given him earlier in the day. "Them blasted, slithering, ghost-raising echoes. Stab my guts if I ever heerd—but Falkens he'll turn up again all right. I knowed all along that he'd turn up. He's so all-fired quiet ye wouldn't never think he could take keer of himself, but he's got arms like iron!"

From the way that Mankus gingerly rubbed one of his own elbows I deduced he must already have felt the force of that iron grip and I believed I knew the reason why. Just at present "the reason" was leaning gracefully over the rail by my side, serenely unconscious of everything except the gentleplash of the brine astern and the rhythmic strokes that caused it.

For more than a quarter of an hour we strained our eyes into the night. Each succeeding moment but added to our perplexity. Then Mankus cried:

"Looky there! My soul! that ain't no boat!"

A small dark object near the base of the walls to our left had emerged from the black of the night—a man swimming! With powerful overhand strokes he drew quickly nearer. He seemed naked from the waist up and wore no shoes. When still some two hundred feet from the stern of the ship he paused to get his breath.

"Swimmer ahoy!" bawled Mankus.

"Ahoy the Irene!" came Falkens's deep voice.

"What's the lay?" cried Mankus. "Say! Ye ain't capsized an' lost our precious boat, have ye?"

Falkens answered, but he had now resumed swimming and the splash of water muffled his words. We waited till he grasped the cable and began to climb, dripping and exhausted, to our side.

I now withdrew into the background to await a more favorable opportunity, but even at this exciting moment when I should have been interested solely in hearing the story that Falkens had to tell, I found myself watching Dorothy's face jealously, hoping and yet fearing that she would betray by some unguarded look or impulsive gesture her real attitude toward Falkens.

In fine, there was no longer any disguising the fact from myself; I was jealous of Falkens. Again I vowed that, come what might, he should not have her. Scarcely an hour ago I had contemplated his return with comparative calmness; I had even shared Dorothy's uneasiness at the long delay, and had told myself again that if she loved him I would surrender her with good grace. But in this last half-hour I had had her to myself—for Mankus no longer counted; her nearness and trustfulness had intoxicated me. I had been her protector and companion without a rival.

The consciousness that for the time being I was "cock of the walk" and the only man on board except her father to whom she could turn had put the fight into me. Henceforth I was in the battle to win and in it to the death.

Yet here was a man come up out of the sea to take her from me as I had taken her from Mankus. Here was Falkens dripping with brine, staggering with exhaustion, pale, and in such a pitiable plight that a woman who loved him must surely disclose her feelings with her first words.

As Falkens clutched the lower rung of the rail and dragged himself to the deck, Dorothy took a step toward him and her lips moved. "Mr. Falkens—you!" she exclaimed as she recognized him, her voice faltering with such evident emotion that I clenched my fists. "Where—where's Mr.

Letcher?" she gasped, clasping her hands tightly together and holding them toward him supplicatingly: "Oh, what has become of him?"

"Safe," said Falkens laconically, pressing the water from his hair, chest, and arms.

"Ulmquist took our boat when we were both ashore. We started to swim back, but Letcher gave out. I got him ashore."

Not by look, tone, or movement did he betray disappointment at Dorothy's eager interest in Letcher. He seemed absolutely proof to her charms as he continued, with quiet assurance:

"He's now comfortably hidden in the rocks, Miss Gaylord; we must get him in the morning."

"We must get him now," said Dorothy firmly.

"No, Miss Gaylord. He's all right; made me promise to rest till daylight. What we must do is to devise some plan for bringing him off."

"How kin we git him without a boat?" demanded Mankus, grinning as if hugely enjoying Letcher's predicament.

"It's got to be done somehow; a raft—"

"And git a raft out ag'in' that current? Nix. That there's the answer to *that* question. I guess Letcher'll have to rustle fer himself. That's the penalty fer the fool stunt of losin' the only boat we got. I guess you said it was him that done it, eh?"

Falkens drew himself up and eyed Mankus steadily. "I said nothing of the kind, Mr. Mankus. For the loss of that boat I take the whole responsibility. It's gone and that's the end of it."

"Well, it was a dern fool stunt anyway," persisted Mankus. "I heerd you say this mornin' you was takin' Letcher along only to watch the boat. An' now think of him a hidin' out there in the rocks all wet! Think of him, doc!" he cried explosively, slapping his sides and turning to me. "Jest think of him, doc!"

At this rather brutal remark I advanced toward them, and when Falkens realized the situation he seemed so genuinely glad to find me alive that I felt heartily ashamed of myself.

He went to his cabin for a change of clothes and then joined us in the saloon to

discuss ways and means of reaching Letcher. When he had eaten dinner he felt so much better he was for swimming back with a load of provisions and attempting to bring Letcher in by easy stages. But from this plan Dorothy and I dissuaded him.

"If we only had some bamboo," said Falkens, "the problem would quickly be solved."

"How so?" I asked.

"Outriggers."

"Outriggers—what's them?" asked Mankus with his most incredulous grin.

"Outridding canoes like those the Malays use to shoot rapids and in interisland trade," explained Falkens patiently. "By working all night I believe the three of us might be able to knock together a narrow tub of a boat from loose lumber—"

"Can't be did—that's the answer to *that* question," grunted Mankus, polishing his mouth with the back of his hand to remove the remains of a large boiled potato with which he had just supplemented his own dinner. "How about calkin' seams? How about oars an' locks? How about ridin' the breakers without turnin' tuttle? Any boat we could make would keep us workin' double shifts fer a month. An' then ye wouldn't git very far. Them breakers is the worst I ever see. The fact of the matter is, ladies and gents, we're prisoners aboard the old Irene, an' here we're a goin' to stick a while. That's the answer to *that* question."

Dorothy evidently took him at his word, for presently she rose and left the saloon without offering any comment.

Personally I was inclined to be a trifle skeptical. I looked for the ulterior motive and found it. I felt convinced Mankus had multiplied objections to the plan because he was not only willing, but eager, to leave Letcher to his fate. Since Captain Jessup's death Mankus had felt that Letcher was his only rival worth fearing, and Dorothy's recently-expressed solicitude over Letcher's fate had confirmed him in this belief and increased his dislike. When I glanced at Falkens I saw that he, too, had read Mankus's motives.

"Who is this Letcher, I'd like to know?" Mankus continued venomously. "A lemon-

rind, dung-heel. He's got a mug on him like a bulldog, an ugly bulldog, an' when he ain't groomin' his manners to make an impression, he ain't no different to one, too. How he kin fool anybody is more— With his swelled head always braggin' an' blowin', an' a first-class nut at that. But behind all that there's something uglier to take into account. Yes, sirree—"

Dorothy had returned, and had heard the last part of this tirade against Letcher.

"Mr. Letcher hasn't done anything to forfeit our assistance," said Falkens. "He's a wonderfully well-read man, and has had some amazing experiences of his own. But this isn't figuring how to rescue him."

I could not but observe how quietly and magnanimously Falkens had championed the man who was not present to defend himself. The contrast between Mankus and Falkens—the one with his slanderous, sledge-hammer blows, the other with his praise where praise was due, marked the depth of the gulf which must ever intervene between the classes from which these two men were drawn. As for the traits in Letcher's make-up which deserved condemnation, Falkens had ignored them.

"I, too, feel that Mr. Letcher is a wonderful man," murmured Dorothy; "wonderful in a good many ways, and deserving of any sacrifice we can now make to help him."

"Is he, though?" growled Mankus. "That's jist the p'int I'm a makin'—not to be disputin' ye, Miss Dor'thy, an' all that sort of think; but is it up to us to save a murderer?"

"A murderer!" I exclaimed.

"Now ye've said somethink. Letcher, he's been too deep fer us. He's been a foolin' of us all along with his talk of drownded spiders an' his innocence. Oh, he's played his keerds careful an' crafty right from the start of the hull think. It's only while I was a monkeyin' round the 'tween-decks and superstructure to-day sort o' thinkin' thinks over an' calculatin'—it's only while I was a settin' here at the table here to-night before dinner in the dark a lookin' toward the skipper's cabin so silent an' solemn, an' puttin' two an' two together, that I tumbled."

Dorothy had turned a trifle pale; she leaned slightly toward Mankus, her lips parted, her eyes containing a look of dread, not pleasant to see.

"What did you learn, Mr. Mankus?" demanded Falkens suddenly.

"I'm almost ascairt to tell ye," he said solemnly, impressively. "If it was to come to a show-down whether I'd lift a hand to save Letcher, I'd vote no. He's out there on the rocks a starvin' to death. Is that righteous? Yea! says I. It's a judgment on him. It's the finger o' Gawd. My soul'd go to hell if I was to lift a finger to save him, or let any one lift a hand to save him while I'm boss of this here ship. Letcher's got to die. For it was him that croaked the skipper, jest like I said at the start—that's the answer to *that* question—an' I got the papers to prove it!"

CHAPTER VIII.

DOROTHY'S CONFESSION.

I HAD never seen Falkens so deeply affected as he was by Mankus's accusation of Letcher. The sudden fire in his eyes and the animation of his face showed that he meditated an immediate reply; but evidently he thought better of it, for he hesitated, toyed a moment with a teaspoon, then pushed his plate slowly from him. Dorothy had risen from her chair, face white and set, hands clenched at her sides, lips slightly parted with an expression which showed she was nerving herself to some resolution. Just as she was about to speak, Falkens, who had now mastered himself, cleared his throat and exclaimed abruptly:

"That makes no difference, Mr. Mankus. There's something much bigger in the lives of us all than the murder of Captain Jessup. There's no sense quibbling about it, no use blinking the facts; we're in a desperate plight here—prisoners, as you say, aboard this helpless hulk; provisions gradually dwindling. It seems to me we've got a man-sized problem to wrestle with. The more heads and hands we have to work on it the better."

Mankus idly poked a thumb-nail into

the empty loops of his cartridge belt and picked at the metal stud of the revolver holster. Belt and gun, with its three cartridges, really belonged to Falkens; but Mankus made no effort to return it, and I somehow gained an impression from his proprietary manner that he did not mean to do so. No doubt he considered that in his capacity of captain of the Irene he had justly requisitioned the gun for any emergency that might arise.

"Humph!" he grunted. "Letcher 'll only eat his head off at the grub, an' it's precious little help we'd git from him. All he kin think of is bugs an' spiders an' wimmin. First thing he'd do if he was to git back aboard he'd croak me or you, or the doc jist like he croaked the skipper. I won't help sitch a scoundrel, nor I won't leave him come aboard. I guess ye got better sense than to try it."

Falkens turned on him like a flash.

"Do you think *I* fear you, Mr. Mankus?" he demanded, and for a moment his eyes blazed with fire, which betrayed his estimate of the mate's conduct and character. But again he controlled himself. "No!" he exclaimed, shaking his head. "I beg your pardon. No use bringing it to an issue on those grounds when I can meet you on your own."

"I *thought* not," rejoined Mankus, grinning at what he considered an easy victory. "I knowed ye was level headed enough to square with my views if I give ye time."

"You've just accused Mr. Letcher of murdering Captain Jessup," continued Falkens evenly. "We ignored your words. But now they cease to be a jest. I advise you to weigh them very carefully before you repeat that accusation."

"I'll repeat it agin. I'll repeat it to you or any one. It was Letcher that croaked the skipper."

"Then—prove it."

"Hey?"

"Prove it."

"Prove it? Of course I kin prove it. Jedge fer yourself. There lays the skipper's cabin right starb'd side for'ard, and there ain't nine paces between it an' Letcher's door on t'other side—nex' to Miss Dor'thy's father's stateroom. When Letcher come

out of his room that night jist before eight bells with the spider-box in his hand—”

“ How do you know Letcher came out of his room just before eight bells that night?” asked Falkens.

“ How do I *know?* How do I *know?* Ain’t I to believe my own eyes?”

“ You saw him, then?”

“ Sure.”

“ Where were you?”

“ I was a goin’ to the engine-room down the starb’d alleyway. Jist as I turned into the shaft I see some one comin’ from near Letcher’s room to go out on the ‘tween-decks.”

“ Did you see his face?”

“ How kin you see a face through the back of the dome? He was stoopin’ over; that’s why he didn’t look as tall as Letcher, an’ was a wearin a long kimony or dressin’-gown; carried somethin’ in his hand. What could be plainer ’n that? Letcher, a bug-catcher with a room full o’ spiders. Poison —bite—spiders—an’ the skipper croaked. Letcher—that’s the answer to that question.”

“ Is that your only reason for thinking Mr. Letcher caused Jessup’s death?”

Mankus, who had settled back in his chair with a self-satisfied look, now leaned forward again and planked his huge hands upon the table.

“ That’s as ye might think; but I ain’t a tellin’ all I know. Ain’t this reason enough?”

“ No!” rejoined Falkens emphatically. “ You didn’t see the man’s face; you didn’t see exactly which room he left; you can’t even swear the object in his hands was a spider-case. Do you still persist in accusing Mr. Letcher?”

“ Strikes me, Mr. Falkens, all this here polly-vooz is foolish. It ain’t a goin’ to change me an’ leave him git aboard. He’s out there on the rocks a starvin’ to death—an’ that’s a jedgment on him fer croakin’ the skipper.”

“ Very well, Mr. Mankus,” said Falkens, rising swiftly and taking a step toward him. “ Then I accuse you—here before two competent witnesses—of foully murdering Captain Jessup!”

Mankus cringed as if he had received a

physical blow, gulped, and moistened his parching lips with his tongue.

“ Wha—what?” he stammered, blinking his red-lidded eyes very rapidly for a few moments and flushing apoplectically.

“ The piece of string which was tied to the lid of the spider-box came from a ball of twine in your cabin. You, by your own confession, were in the vicinity of Jessup’s cabin at the time the crime must have been committed. No one aboard had more reason to hate and fear Captain Jessup than yourself. He had threatened to complain to the owners of your carelessness and ignorance and obtain your discharge. Your conduct the day following the murder was decidedly suspicious. Every one of us can testify to these things. The question of your guilt is not only a possibility in our minds—it is a decided probability.”

In the course of this terrible arraignment Mankus continued to gulp and change color, and once he clawed at his throat as if struggling for breath. But now, by what seemed for him an unusual effort he partly mastered his terror, and at the conclusion broke into a hoarse laugh.

“ He! He!” he tittered. “ That there’s what I call ‘umor. Better feed that up to a jury, then I’ll git damages fer deformation er libel. But how’d ye know the string come from a ball in my cabin? How’d ye know that?” he demanded.

“ I compared it; it was freshly cut with a knife and tied with sailor’s knots.”

“ O-ho!” cried Mankus with an ugly sneer. “ The sock-foot agin! The gum-shoe sock-foot that sneaked out on the ‘tween-decks that night. So ye sneaked into my cabin, too, to find something ye could hold up ag’in’ me—like a weasel! I thought ye was white. Now I find ye’re a—”

“ Take care!” cautioned Falkens, a sharp, commanding note in his voice. “ Your eagerness to sidestep a regular investigation was the cause of my actions—for which I make no apology. And now you’ve brought all this upon yourself by your cold-blooded accusation of Mr. Letcher.”

Mankus shifted uneasily, and gained time by lighting a cigarette. His great hands were actually trembling as he did so.

"Sure now. Miss Dor'thy," he said, appealing to the girl, "you don't think it was me that done it?"

Dorothy had seated herself at the opposite end of the table. When Mankus addressed her she glanced quickly in his direction. "Can't you see the case is just as strong against you as it is against Mr. Letcher?" she cried eagerly. "You won't refuse to help him now?"

"Oh! Aye! So that's the lay?" he snorted, closing one eye in a tremendous wink and hooking his thumbs into his suspenders. "Guess I'm commencin' to tumble. He cooked it up to accuse me so's to clear Letcher an' git me to help him. But seein' 's I never done fer the skipper, it must 'a' been Letcher, an' that's the answer to that question."

Falkens lit a cigar with the slow deliberation which was the only mark of his impatience, and resumed his seat.

"Your denial, Mr. Mankus, has little weight," he said slowly. "There's more evidence against you now than against Letcher—"

"What of it?" demanded Mankus hotly. "I know what *I* done an' what I never done. You kin count me outen it; an' seein' I'm boss here, I ain't a goin' to leave him git back, because there's more evydence ag'in' him than anybody else, barrin' me."

"Not at all," returned Falkens, smiling. "There's less evidence against Letcher than almost any one you could mention."

"What ye givin' us? Do ye mean to say there's less evidence ag'in' Letcher than ag'in' the doc here, fer instance? Or ag'in' yerself? Or old Dan'l Gaylord, or Miss Dor'thy there—or Ul'quist, or that darty little devil of a steward, Omura, fer instance?"

"Yes, that's what I mean."

Mankus grinned expressively and turned to me. "Wouldn't it beat ye, doc!" he cried, holding his sides and rocking with laughter. "Where's the logic in that? Why, I never heard o' sitch a think! 'Prove it! Prove it!'"

"Certainly."

"Prove it ag'in' the darty little devil of a steward, fer instance," said Mankus satirically, selecting the one last mentioned.

"Very well. Omura had received a beating from the captain for failing to bring his Scotch on time. It's not going too far to say Captain Jessup treated him like a dog. Japanese-Malays are the most revengeful creatures living. Omura had access to all the staterooms. He, more easily than any one, could have taken the spider-case from Mr. Letcher's room and the string from yours. You force me to say some ugly things, Mr. Mankus. But come; admit it. Why couldn't it have been Omura who dropped the spider-case into the port, even more readily than it could have been Mr. Letcher?"

"That's so!" I exclaimed, all but convinced by this skilful manipulation of the evidence. "Why haven't we thought of this before?"

"We ain't thought of it before," retorted Mankus bluntly, "because it won't hold salt water, an' that's the truth."

"It seems plausible to me," I contended. "What's the matter with it?"

"Worms an' barnacles—that's what's the matter with it. Mr. Falkens—he's purty darned smart to trim sails to fit that darty little devil of a steward, an' I ain't sayin' but what his lingo answers the helm an' seems ship-shape enough in fair weather. Why, it's jist like a purty picture of an old-style four-master, spankin' full rigged up the channel before the trade wind. But let a squall strike her—she'll veer galley-west about an' turn tuttle, bein' et through hull an' ribs with rat-holes. Mr. Falkens, he'd make a top-notch lawyer, but he ain't no sailor, an' that ye kin see without a glass."

Mankus grinned broadly, as if at some amusing recollection, and continued:

"Ye see, Mr. Falkens, ye ain't studied yer man. That darty little devil of a steward 'd been homesick without the skipper raggin' an' man-handlin' him. He growded fat offen it, like jackies offen duff. The trip before this the skipper jumped him twicet as hard as this, an' the darty little devil could o' signed off at Hong-Kong."

"But did he? Nit! He tooken the pen an' signed on agin, the skipper cussin' him the while an' he only grinnin' like mad. The night of the murder, when I passed the steerage abaft the galley, there was the

darty little devil curled up an' swayin' in his hammock as happy as ye please.

"Besides, the man I see shamblin' toward the 'tween-decks at eight bells was too tall fer the steward. Omura, he walks quick like a cat an' picks up his feet high; but this fella kind o' shuffled along limpin' almost, an' seemed kind o' old. Why, instead o' bein' that darty little devil of a steward it might better 'a' been old Dan'l Gaylord hisself!"

"Dad!" moaned Dorothy under her breath, and I saw that her face was like wax.

"Did ye speak, Miss Dor'thy?" asked Mankus, turning toward her. "No? Well, as I was sayin', instead o' Omura, the person I see that night might better 'a' been Mr. Gaylord—or Mr. Falkens here, from the shape of the dome—"

Mankus paused abruptly, and his jaw sagged as if a sudden great thought had just come to him. Then he shook his head slowly. "I said it was Letcher, an' stab my guts if I don't stick to it! He'll never git aboard this craft while I got a cartridge in the gun!"

Falkens turned suddenly, as if about to reply, but Dorothy forestalled him.

"The person you saw that night was myself," said she, a hard, strained note in her voice.

"Hay? Hay?" returned Mankus blankly, his cigarette dropping from his mouth.

"It was I!" repeated Dorothy. "I wore a long kimono and stooped over."

"Hay?" cried Mankus sharply, exhaling with such vigor that the stuffing of his cigarette blew out and scattered, burning, over the table-cloth. "Ye wore a long kimony an' stooped— Well, now, who'd 'a' thunk it. Why, I never heerd o' sitch a think! I thought it was Letcher all along; an' now it was you! Why didn't I 'a' knowned it then? I guess I never heerd 'a' sitch a— But what ye a givin' us, gal? You had somethink in yer hand! I see—"

"The spider-case, of course."

"Mother of God! Then it was *you* as done it!"

"Yes," continued Dorothy in the same expressionless tones. "It was I who dropped it in the port-hole!"

"For Heaven's sake, Miss Gaylord, think what you are saying!" I exclaimed. But just then I remembered that I, too, had seen her that night going toward the 'tween-decks, and the realization appalled me.

"This has gone too far," said Falkens chokingly, as he rose and rapped on the table with a fist. "What Miss Gaylord has just said is false. I—I don't believe her. I have good reason to think it was a man who was guilty of this crime. I—I—"

Dorothy glanced at him in vexation, and bit her lip to keep back a sharp retort. Evidently she expected him to make some important disclosure, for she waited for him to continue. When he hesitated, and stopped in evident confusion, her vexation quickly changed to a look of deep scorn.

"Is that all you have to say, Mr. Falkens?" she asked coldly.

Falkens, thus taken to task, compressed his lips and flushed as if he felt the irony of her words, but was determined to abide by his decision.

"That is all," he returned shortly.

"Then I shall know what to think of you," she said scornfully. "As for myself, you all knew my feelings toward Captain Jessup. I—resolved to kill him. I saw Mr. Letcher throw his spiders in the basin, and— But why detail the miserable story? I am the guilty person."

The fact of Dorothy's guilt did not seem to concern Mankus so vitally as the bare suspicion of Letcher's had done. Mankus lit a fresh cigarette, drummed idly on the table, and actually grinned.

"Well, now, Miss Dor'thy," he said, a new note of respect in his voice, as he eyed her with undisguised admiration, "if ye done it, then I guess ye must 'a' had good an' sufficient cause to do it, which it ain't up to us to question or throw in yer teeth. Why, if ye done it, you was sure justified! That clears the little gal, fore an' aft, t'-gal-lants to keelson. Come, doc, that there's what I call good news."

"It also clears Mr. Letcher," I reminded.

This put a damper on his spirits, for he shrugged his shoulders, and an ugly expression supplanted his grin as he realized the truth of my contention.

"That's so," he conceded grudgingly, staring hard at the opposite bulkhead as if in profound thought. "That's different agin. But I guess we can't git round that there proposition—that's the answer to that question. Somehow I can't git the idee out o' my dome that Letcher croaked the skipper. Him a bug-ketcher—poison—bite—spiders—an' Jessup gone.

"Ye kin take my advice or leave it, but I'm strong fer not leavin' him git back aboard; he'll only stir up trouble agin. But now it was Miss Dor'thy done it, an' all along I thought it was Letcher. Why, I guess I never heerd o' sitch a 'think! Wouldn't it beat ye, doc?" he cried, laughing explosively and slapping his chest. "All along I thought it was Letcher, an' now it was Miss Dor'thy! He, he!"

The horrifying confession of murder which I had just listened to had startled me considerably, but as Mankus talked I revolved it in my mind and began to see daylight. Was it possible Dorothy had believed that the man whom Mankus saw shuffling along toward the 'tween-decks with something in his hand was her own father? If so, her motives in attempting to assume the guilt were obvious: by her confession she hoped not only to clear Letcher, a man in whose fate she seemed vitally interested, but to shield her father and turn aside any suspicion of him that might later arise in the minds of any of us.

I now recalled Dorothy's anguish on several occasions when the subject had been discussed, and when any new line of inquiry had been opened. Without a doubt she had seen her father go toward the 'tween-decks that night—or return from it.

I remembered, also, how Daniel Gaylord had persistently declined all discussion of the subject, his nervousness when it was referred to, and his hasty retreats to his cabin several times in the very midst of the inquiry.

As for Dorothy's vexation at Falkens, I knew not what to think. Suppose she knew that Falkens also had seen her father go toward the 'tween-decks that night. Falkens's refusal to shield him would naturally rouse her anger, for if the guilt were allowed to rest on her shoulders, she would

probably escape punishment, but if it were her father who should be convicted the sequel would tell quite another story.

I was not quite certain, either, that Mankus was as completely taken-in by Dorothy as he allowed us to think. It seemed to me that Mankus, when accused of the crime, had shown too much confusion for a man with a clear conscience. Mankus had not been entirely frank with us; he had kept some conclusive bit of evidence in reserve; might even have manufactured a situation for the purpose of damning Letcher and justifying himself in refusing to allow Letcher aboard.

If Mankus himself were guilty, that alone would explain his great complacence at Dorothy's confession: his rollicking high spirits marred only by the knowledge that Letcher must now be allowed to return.

A more interesting phase of the situation occurred to me; what if Mankus feared George Letcher not only as a rival for the girl, but because Letcher was in possession of some damaging testimony against him?

"Now about that boat," said Falkens abruptly. "We've wasted a quarter of an hour in talk. Lacking bamboo for outriggers, we'll have to devise something else."

"No, we won't!" I exclaimed. "One trip up the ladder to the top of the cliff will furnish us with enough bamboo for ten outriggers."

Mankus snorted and interposed all sorts of objections, but, finding himself ignored, he swaggered out on deck.

By the time I had prepared for my trip he had concluded to accept conditions with 'good grace, for he returned and said afably:

"Well, doc, I see yer dome is set on gettin' that Letcher back agin, an' nothink won't change it. No use to take the hardest way about, says I, and mebbe I kin help ye." He paused and looked about. "Where's the cap?"

"Who?"

"Where's Mr. Falkens?"

"He's down getting tools—here he comes now."

Mankus turned and faced him. "Ye won't need them tools, Mr. Falkens," he said respectfully. "Jist now, when I was

a squinting into the main hatch, I remembers there's a Chinee tub-boat stowed in there. All we got to do, cap, is rig up blocks an' tackles an' h'ist her. I won't take my 'davy she'll ride them fierce breakers, cap, but she's pretty deep keeled, an' we can do wuss'n take a chanst, I guess."

For the next two hours the three of us worked hard, and when we had hoisted the little tub to the deck, rendered her seaworthy, shaped an extra pair of oars, and lowered her over the stern, we turned in to rest till daylight.

The question of who were to go on the expedition was the first thing that engaged our attention next morning. Falkens seemed to take it for granted he and I would go.

"Doctor, are you ready?" he asked, after we had despatched a hasty breakfast, while Mankus was out on deck collecting tools.

"See here," I objected as Dorothy went out with a tray of dishes. "We can't leave Miss Gaylord alone with—"

"That's so!" he exclaimed. "I tried it yesterday. I thought I could trust—but it won't do. You must stay here, Vawter."

I had set my heart on the trip, and we finally compromised by matching coins. I won. Without further ado we walked aft, and I took my place in the little boat and untied the painter.

"So the cap ain't a goin'," observed Mankus, sticking his square head over the rail. "Ye look sort o' lonesome, doc. What'd ye say if I was to offer to ply an oar fer ye?"

I hesitated to acquiesce on account of his animosity to Letcher, but not wishing to seem ungracious, I told him to jump in and come along if he thought Letcher would not take to the bushes at sight of him.

"Oh! Aye!" he grunted, closing one eye in a tremendous wink. Then he slid down the rope and sprang aboard with a dexterity and an agility I envied. "Letcher, he'll be tickled to death t' clap lamps on any one that's a bringin' the grub wagon. Letcher, he's in the rocks at the tip of the first p'int of land, did ye say, Mr. Falkens? A hundred strides up the beach? We can't miss him in a fog! Don't let nothink hap-

pen to the little gal, cap. I'd leave ye the gun only—"

"That's all right, Mankus," called Falkens, though I believed he was not particularly pleased with the arrangement. "As for the gun, you keep it till you get back."

"Thankee, sir. You're man enough t' take keer o' her. Look what ye done t' the—" He paused as if remembering himself. "Look what she done to the skipper. Stab my guts if I'd admire to be in the shoes of the next man wot tried it. Damned if ever I see an uglier corp 'n him when he come a lungin' out'n that berth, all swellt up so his laigs was like to bust out'n his drawers. But I guess Letcher's elected for the next one. Yoho! There's the little gal now. So-long, Miss Dor'thy. We'll we back a bringin' a precious cargo by noon."

Dorothy came quickly to the rail at some distance from Falkens and looked down at us. Her realization that she was to be left alone with Falkens did not seem to appeal to her. Ever since Falkens had discounted her confession of the murder of Jessup she had avoided him. I had seen her gazing at him with an expression I could not define. Well, it was a peculiar mix-up, and that was the truth!

Mankus and I bent to the oars and soon reached the outlet. My impression that Falkens doubted the wisdom of allowing Mankus to go lingered in my mind, and just before a twist in the channel whisked the ship from our sight I thought I saw him waving to us frantically.

But when I sprang to my feet for a better view I could see nothing, and I came to the conclusion I had been mistaken. After a short struggle with the billowing surf, we made open water and turned west along the cliffs.

The breeze was extremely light and variable, the sea comparatively calm, the sky almost cloudless. The early morning sun beat fiercely hot upon our backs as the elongated shadows which it threw in front of the prow gradually contracted. Mankus peeled off his shirt and, fastening it to a headline, dropped it astern.

"Look at the sweat run out'n it already,

doc!" he cried. "Each man his own Chink laundry, except them that's spliced an' got their gals along of them. I learned this here trick over to the Gold Coast, bein' a single man, so to speak, in them days, an' not contemplatin' matrimony. That is to say, not the kind of matrimony where ye got to fork over two bucks to a preacher, an' all that sort o' thing. They do it fer less up to Chefoo on account of—"

He paused suddenly, as if remembering himself. Cocking his square head on one side, he turned and squinted several times toward the sky.

"She's a goin' to be a scorcher of a day, doc," he observed sagely. "Puts me in mind of wunst I shipped before the mast on a sail ship an' we was beca'med, but I disremember if it was in the little Caymans or along nigh Trinidad. I'd hate to be out on the rocks right now, like Letcher, without no water to swig. Here goes!"

He opened the water cask we had brought and took a long drink.

"Yoho! That steadies the ballast an' sends the juice a running up into the to'gallants to ketch every thimbleful o' wind. But if ye stow away too much it slops about like darty bilge. Want some, doc?"

"No. Better go slow on it. Letcher 'll need it."

"I'm a savin' some fer him. He's a camel. Besides, who's a breakin' their backs at the oars—Letcher? Not that guy. He's a loafin' on the rocks; mebbe laffin' at us a sweatin' over the blades, an' all along of him bein' dern ass enough to lose the boat yestiddy. How he kin fool any gal is more'n I kin savvee—that four-flusher, that dung-heel!"

The memory of George Letcher's shortcomings was evidently too much for him, for he tugged away viciously, and it was several minutes before he glanced round at me again and asked quizzically:

"Doc, was ye ever contemplatin'—?" He slowly closed one eye in a tremendous wink.

"Contemplatin' what?" I inquired.

"Contemplatin' matrimony, o' course. Them's the words that follers along together, ain't they? Spliced side by side, like man an' wife. That's lingo any man of thirty that's sound in the dome an' duff

hatch kin understand, ain't it? Was ye ever contemplating matrimony, doc?"

"Of course," I returned frankly. "I've contemplated matrimony several times in my life."

"That is to say, matrimony with a view?"

"With a view to what?" I asked.

"A view to marriage, o' course."

"What's the difference? It's all the same, isn't it?"

"That's as ye might think," he replied, biting a generous chew from a large plug and shaking his head. "Some does and some don't. Now take that dung-heel over yonder to the rocks. He's a contemplatin' matrimony, but without no views, so to speak, to marriage. Not that I holds that up again him, gen'rally speakin'; every man's entitled to what he kin ketch an' salt down in his own private pickle-barrel, unless his nets runs foul of another man's who planted hisn first."

"You stow away my words fer future reference. If ever he gits back to the ship alive an' sound in the dome, he's a goin' to stir up trouble. So that's the answer to that question—why, he ain't never to git back to the ship!"

The unlooked-for termination of his remarks filled me with vague uneasiness. I now noted that our boat was standing a much greater distance from the cliffs than was necessary. Mankus had done the steering, and by the time the point of the promontory became visible, fully half a league of heaving blue lay between.

I accordingly backed water with my left oar and pulled hard on my right with a view to turning inshore, but Mankus, with superior skill and greater brawn, easily counteracted my efforts.

"What ye doin', doc?" he asked genially. "We got to stand off a bit longer till we kin squint along the beach an' git a proper survey of the lay of the land, so's not t' run foul o' the mutyneers." But presently he rested on his oars, and after sousing himself with brine, took a third generous pull at the water-cask.

"Do ye know, doc, that fellah Falkens is a wiz," he observed speculatively, with more than a note of admiration in his voice.

"I guess I always claimed nobody between Marseilles an' Macassar was handier with the tools than me, but did ye notice him when we was a tailorin' the boat last night? He's a bear on them block an' tackle, too. 'Longside o' him, you looked like a land-lubber on yer fust voyage, an' I felt like one."

"Now, it seems queer t' me a gal like Miss Dor'thy don't cotton t' Mr. Falkens an' him t' her, but that's the way. He don't pay no more attention t' her than if she wasn't there; treats her like she was a man. Either he ain't interested in the females, or else he's got a gal back home."

"I guess Miss Dor'thy left a lover or two back home, too," he continued, resuming the oars, "but that's different. Females ain't bothered with sich thinks. It's the fellas that kin throw the heftiest bluff at the proper time lands 'em. But Cap Falkens, he's steady to the gal back home, an' she, instead o' feelin' slighted, is glad to be left alone. I guess it's some sort o' instinct tells a girl whicht is the right guy fer her. Ye wouldn't think, to look at her, she could see any one but Letcher, but I knows what she's a doin'—she's makin' up to him so as to git me riled an' jealous." He paused and took a fresh chew of sailor's twist.

"A funny thing, this coortin' game. She says to herself: 'That there Peter Mankus—there's the upstandin' figger of a man fer me. But he's a leetle too sure. I got to make him so jealous he'll eat out'n my fist. I got to play him like a trout; keep him guessin', or he'll likely lose interest an' dig out if things come too easy fer him. Peter, he's the man fer me!'

"That's what she says to herself, so she's been a playin' up to Letcher jist to make me jealous. That's the answer to *that* question."

He cocked his head round with that foolish leer of his wherever a woman was concerned, and said:

"Ye know, doc, she calls me Peterkin when she thinks o' me.. Whadda ye think—Pe-ter—"

"Indeed!" I interrupted.

We were now clear of the promontory and far enough on the other side to obtain a glimpse of the narrow strip of beach. Our

boat was standing so far out to sea, it would have been almost impossible to see Letcher unless he were near the water's edge, but Mankus evidently had no intention of rowing nearer.

"There lays the beach," he said, swinging our boat around, "an' yonder lays the rocks above it; kin you see Letcher? Nit! Letcher ain't there; he's gone; skinned out; joined the mutineers an' sailed away. We better row back to the Irene."

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT IN THE SMALL BOAT.

MANKUS sent the blades ripping through the water before I could realize what he meant to do.

"Hold on!" I exclaimed. "I don't understand. I must have heard you wrong."

"Why, it's plain enough," he returned, glancing round at me and grinning. "Letcher, he ain't there; so, after havin' carefully searched the beach an' rocks, we're a going back to the ship."

"This is no search—this is brutal! No!" I cried with quickly rising anger. "Drop that right oar—head for the beach! I'm going to land on it! I believe Letcher's there."

"Now, looky here, doc—"

"Do as I tell you—quick!"

Mankus turned slowly and faced me. "Why, doc, what's got into ye?" he asked in an argumentative tone. "Do you guess I'd lie to ye? Ain't the beach bare? Ain't we squinted along it, an' seen that Letcher wa'n't there? There's facts, ain't it? That's logic. All along I thought ye was fallin' in with my views, an' now ye was only foolin' me all the time."

"But I guess ye must be sick with the heat. The sun's got into yer dome. I guess I'll have t' git ye back t' the old Irene in a hurry an' tell Miss Dor'thy t' stick an onion plaster on yer Adam's apple. Yer words comes out crooked. Mr. Falkens, he'll know what ails ye when I tell him—"

"Are you going to the beach or not?" I demanded; white with anger, struggling desperately to turn the boat inshore.

Mankus must now have realized I was in earnest, and no longer to be hoodwinked or influenced by his words, for suddenly he dropped both his oars and faced me again, an ugly look on his face.

"It 'pears to me yer spoolin' fer a lickin'," he sneered. "Ye sass back like ye thought ye was boss. It ain't wise fer a sawbones t' talk thataway t' his captain. I guess ye don't recollect Peter Mankus is now skipper of the Irene Statler; Peter Mankus, late first mate, and ye're only Vawter, the sawbones, liable fer mutiny. Yes, sirree—liable fer mutiny—that there's the civil answer to *that* qu—"

"You didn't answer my question," I flung at him sharply.

"Oh! Aye! I didn't, hey?" he bawled. "I didn't answer yer stinkin', rotten, skunk-tail of a question, hey?" he bellowed, his face turning purple with the sudden angry rush of blood, and the veins standing out on his forehead. "Oh! Aye! I'll answer it! Yoho! I'll answer it! You shrimp! You four-flusher! Fer a couple o' cash I'd pitch ye in the brine an' tell 'em ye went crazy with the heat an' drowneded yerself. Fer another cash I'd twist yer runty neck into the bargain till the goo run out'n yer beak an' mouth, an' yer lamps popped out like a squashed rat. Stab my guts if I wouldn't!"

By this time my anger had reached white heat. Throwing caution to the winds, I jerked the board on which he was sitting from under him and dumped him into the stern across the water cask. Then I sprang upright in the little cockle-shell of a boat and struck at him savagely with a shore anchor.

The blow caught him above the left ear with considerable vigor, and just as he rose with a volley of profanity to grapple with me, I followed it with a nasty fluke-jab in the bulging ribs of his hairy red chest. He sucked air like a stricken walrus, and sprawled under the seat upon the wooden-grating between the oar-locks—spitting blood and cursing; but before I could knock him out, what with the teetering of the boat, the awkwardness of my weapon, the shank of which became tangled in the rope, the difficulty of maintaining my bal-

ance, and the fact that my feet constantly slipped on the wet planks, he managed to scramble to his knees, and with a cry of rage hurled the water cask straight into the pit of my stomach.

Unfortunately I had just thrust out both arms to prevent myself from pitching overboard, and therefore was unable to ward off the blow. There was no room in which to sidestep without throwing my weight on the narrow gunwale, which would have capsized the boat in short order and brought our trip to an untimely end. I tried to turn and advance a hip, but too late. The missile caught me squarely in the wind and rebounded between his knees.

The blow was wicked enough, but the cask lacked weight, for it was more than half empty, and I succeeded in retaliating with an oar before pain and nausea overcame me. I reeled and collapsed, half stunned and woozy, and the next thing I remember I was grappling with the mate in the bottom of the boat, the bilge rushing about and choking me, the little cockle-shell rocking from side to side and shipping gallons of salt water over the gunwale.

The bilge had a nauseous reek of decaying fish, tar, and dirty Chinamen, who for ages had lived and slept and worked and fished in the boat on the Hoang-Ho; and all the unspeakable refuse which had been collecting for decades in the seams had now soaked loose, and was splashing up through the planking to fill my hair, mouth, and eyes with a putrescent and sirupy compound, while Mankus struggled to gouge me in the wind with the water-cask. Fortunately, I still gripped the handle of the oar, and sometimes, when the rock of the boat threw me uppermost, I managed to deliver a telling blow.

The rising bilge floated the cask into the bow beyond his reach, and when he made a grab for the anchor-ring, I jerked my feet from under him, and we grappled.

Ordinarily I should have been no match for him, but he was weak and groggy from the blows of my oars; and when we finally broke away and staggered to our feet, he stood swaying a moment, heavy-lidded, and then pitched drunkenly overboard by the stern.

His great bulk went down like a shot, and I, weak and trembling, sank to my knees and lay heavily across the gunwales, my hands dragging limply in the water.

He came up choking and gasping a yard astern, and I saw a helpless, piteous look in his vapid fish eyes before he sank once more.

I wondered whether he would come up again. I wondered whether a leg, an arm, or his head would be the first to appear. I almost hoped no portion of *him* would appear. But as my brain quickly cleared I experienced a reaction. When four sections of time had passed and three more had dragged by I found myself beginning to hope—to pray—that Mankus would rise again.

My insane anger had entirely passed. It had failed to survive the sight of him swaying drunkenly, helplessly, in the boat just before he pitched overboard. And now the utter folly of our argument, anger, and bar-room brawl filled me with self-loathing.

John Falkens had spoken wisdom when he said that something of vastly greater import than Jessup's murder had come into the lives of us all; when he urged us to sink our private jealousies and bickerings and combine our heads and hands for work on the greater problem, the fight for freedom; and now I realized that if we were to devise a plan of escape from the entombed ship, Mankus was too valuable an asset to lose.

I had made the mistake of getting angry; Falkens would not have done so. I felt, too, that he would have found a way to reconcile Mankus and Letcher, and unite them in the work for the common welfare; yet I had only spilled the fat in the fire.

If Mankus drowned, I should be responsible. I had no real quarrel with Mankus. I shrank from the burden of causing his death. Besides, that queer, weak, helpless look of his just before he sank had been too much. And now even the bubbles which marked the spot where he vanished had ceased to rise.

With a cry of dismay, I sprang up and hurled myself into the water. Down, down I swam till my right hand came in contact with one of his boots. His body

was limp and pliant; there was no struggle left in him, no sign of consciousness. When I dragged him to the surface, shook the water from my eyes, and glanced around, I saw that the cockle-shell had drifted nearly fifteen fathoms, and was headed out to sea.

After no end of frantic work I succeeded in towing him to it, where I looped the painter round his shoulders and tugged him up over the stern.

The little boat having shipped several additional gallons of brine in the process, my first task was to bale out; then I set about the work of resuscitation. First I resorted to all the feasible methods and tricks known to medical science to dislodge and express the water from his lungs and induce respiration. I had no pulmотор.

Then, with his legs still hanging over the stern and his shoulders resting beneath the seat, I made the most of the cramped quarters and worked his arms as methodically as I could from his sides up over his head and back again. It was no easy task.

Half an hour passed; he showed no spark of life. His face was like a plaster cast; without a stethoscope, I could detect no flutter of heart or pulse. Redoubling my efforts, I shook and kneaded him as vigorously as I could. It was no use.

Dropping his arms, I took a drink of water, and then returned to the work. When the limit of time which is usually allowed such cases had passed, I realized that my efforts had been wasted, and that the only thing to do was to dump him overboard. Long hours in the tropical sun had pretty thoroughly robbed me of my vigor, and I found that I was unable to hoist the heavy carcass from the floor of the boat.

He had been such an exceedingly well-nourished individual! Every morning he could tuck away nearly a dozen fried eggs—cold-storage eggs at that—and follow it up with a stack of wheats a foot high, and now it was I who had to suffer for his greediness! I tugged and tugged, however, and just as I succeeded in forcing his shoulders over the side I saw that a faint tinge of color had crept into his face.

"That was a near thing, my friend," I said grimly, when I had safely steered him

through the fit of strangulation, retching, and nausea essential to a speedy recovery. "You've been skating dangerously close to the edge."

"I'm a dyin', doc, a dyin'," he gurgled, wheezing and drooling and spitting brine.

"Rot!"

"A dyin'—a dyin', doc!" he groaned, coughing and striking his chest with his huge fists.

"Sit up and try taking a few strokes at the oars," I told him.

He made a wry face and turned over on one side.

"I guess I'm done fer—I ain't long to live," he said wheezingly, as he felt the lumps on his head with his fingers and gave vent to a series of the most heartrending moans imaginable. But when he found that, instead of being faced with approaching dissolution, he continued to improve, he ceased his absurd groaning and sat up.

"My laigs is so weak, jist like a cat, doc," he informed me with an air of stupid surprise. "Jist like an ornery, slinkin', one-eyed cat."

I murmured my comprehension and expressed my sympathy. Yet upon reflection I failed to see the exact application of these words. All specimens of the genus feline which came within my knowledge were supplied by nature with limbs as well muscled, tough, and wiry as was needed for the pursuit of a most active existence. One-eyed cats in particular seemed singularly favored in this regard; at least, the only one I had known was a crook-tailed Thomas with a very comfortable appetite and well-developed predatory instincts, who could outmaneuver and outfight any two-eyed, God-fearing cat in the neighborhood, and could rake more garbage out of a can with one lusty paw in a given time than any cat I ever heard of.

The day was so extremely warm and sticky, however, that I lacked the breath to argue with him, and I lay in the bottom of the boat, panting from my recent exertions, a piece of wet sailcloth over my head.

"Them biffs on my dome was pretty fierce, doc," he said, looking foolish. "I wouldn't never 'a' drowned thataway if ye hadn't jumped me when I wa'n't a lookin'."

And all along I was jist a foolin' with ye, doc. Was jist a foolin' all along, a tryin' ye out, an' I wouldn't never 'a' dreamed o' beatin' it back to the ship without landin' fer Letcher any more'n I'd 'a' hurt a hair o' yer precious dome."

"Do you forget the threats you made against my life?" I asked. "The names you called me—your rage?"

"Jist byplay, doc. Why, thinks I, here's the doc a plannin' to cut straight into the beach in plain sight o' them mutyneers, 'stead o' crawlin' along shore hid by the rocks. Here's the doc without no more plan 'n a bebby to keep from bein' jumped by them fierce mutyneers, who'd swipe his little Chinee tub-boat an' turn him loose t' shift like they done Letcher.

"Thinks I, Peter Mankus has got t' guard the doc ag'in' hisself; Peter Mankus has got t' wheedle the doc into puttin' back round the p'int out o' sight before a lookin' fer Letcher. That there's common sense. That there's logic. That there's wisd'm."

He had hauled in his shirt from over the stern to wring the water out of it, and at each word he gave it an additional vigorous twist.

"So that's what I was a thinkin' all along," he continued. "But sudtent as a spankin' jibb'm, ye flies up an' biffs me in the dome—like the tail of a runnin' ratline, yer two lamps a blazin', an' the holes in yer beak stretched wide an' a grabbin' at the air. And all along I was only a foolin'. I guess I never heerd o' sitch a think, doc; I never heerd o' sitch a think!"

By this time Mankus actually believed that events had fallen out exactly as he described them, and I did not seek to contradict him. It was sufficient that, on account of the great fright he had received, he was now tractable and willing to rescue George Letcher.

While Mankus talked I glanced toward the shore, and found that our boat had floated a considerable distance out to sea during the hours we had wasted in bickering, fighting, and recovering. The cliffs almost blended with the horizon, and were partly obscured by haze.

We had drifted in an easterly direction,

and the promontory where George Letcher was concealed seemed a mere speck. The shortness of shadows and the vertical position of the sun showed that it was already past noon. Both our watches had stopped running on account of our plunge in the ocean.

Without further loss of time, we rowed to the eastern side of the promontory near the point. Here, beaching the boat in a sheltered inlet, we clambered up the rocks. After a short, unsuccessful search, we returned to the boat in the inlet to compare notes.

We had found the spot where Letcher had passed the night. To judge by the marks of his shoes, he had crawled from his hiding-place down to the beach several times that morning. Then he had walked westward some hundred yards toward Ulmquist's camp. If it had been Letcher's intention to throw himself upon the mercy of Ulmquist, he had, for some unknown reason, changed his mind and darted into a clump of scrub bushes near the foot of the cliff. From this concealment he had been dragged only after a struggle. The marks of five pairs of feet, including those of Ulmquist and the biggest of the negroes, told the story.

"Well, doc," said Mankus, sitting down on his thick haunches and opening a case of biscuit which we had brought for George Letcher, "I claimed all along he'd j'in that skunk Ul'quist. Good riddance to bad rub-bitch, the hull pack on 'em, says I. Lay to at the grub, doc. Better carry our ballast a leetle higher up on the back trip. An' we'd oughta be a startin' before the surf gits any heftier."

By this time, however, I was mad clear through, and obstinate. The failure of my plan to accomplish my mission and return hours ago to the comfort of the ship had been caused solely by the mate's folly. Perhaps the loss of a good hot lunch was mainly responsible for my present black mood.

Of course, George Letcher was probably as well off with the crew as he would be on the Irene Statler. Particular respect or friendly regard for Letcher I had not. He seemed to have stolen a march on us all,

so far as the girl was concerned. Though I scorned to elevate him to the dignity of a rival, I began to foresee that he might prove a much more important figure in the final reckoning than I had at first been led to believe.

Furthermore, the easiest thing for me to do would be to leave him to his fate and return, as Mankus now suggested, to the ship. But would it be so simple a matter to explain the reason of my failure to Dorothy, whose concern over his prolonged absence had been genuine?

This thought, as much as my slumbering anger against the mate and my impulse to espouse any plan in direct opposition to his own, may have been responsible for my decision.

"Out with the rest of that chow and the water cask," I said impatiently. "Out with them, and hide them away in these bushes."

"Hey?" asked Mankus, stuffing his mouth full of crackers. "What's the lay?"

"I'm going to stay here."

"Oh, come now, doc, that ain't—"

"Oh, yes, it is!"

"But what you a goin' t' do?"

"What I set out to do! After dark I'm going over to the camp. You go back to the ship and tell Mr. Falkens."

Ah, even in this civilized age it is frequently a quick solution of difficulties to tote a gun at one's hip. I had removed the gun from Mankus while he was recovering from his plunge, and it now enabled me to speak with entire authority.

"Oh! Aye!" he grunted, jerking loose the painter from the bush. "If yer dome's sot on it, that's the answer to that question."

He inserted the oars in the locks and shoved the boat into the water. Then he glanced back hungrily at the half-finished box of biscuits.

"Tell ye what, doc. Give me three more biscuits an' I'll bring grub enough fer two right away. But, doc," he cried with a note of sincerity, "recollect that skunk Ul'quist ain't got no love fer ye. He's like t' cut yer windpipes at bolo-range. Go slow, doc. Jist supposin' ye never was to show up no more?"

This whimsical reflection evidently touched the chords of sentimentality in his paradoxical make-up — chords with which he was well supplied on occasion—and almost with tears in his voice he essayed to plead with me again.

"No, doc, it ain't philos'phy. It's like a buttin' yer dome into the jawr of a man-eater shark, into a school of jell'fish that 'll sting ye to death. Stab my guts if 'tain't! Better come along of me back t' the old Irene, the cap', an' Miss Dor'thy—"

I bundled him into the boat and shoved it vigorously through the surf. Then I watched the powerful, methodical strokes of his oars till a bend in the coast-line blotted him from my sight.

After all, I meditated, Mankus bore me no real grudge, and I believed I could depend on him to return with water and rations, unless Dorothy should chance to betray too much solicitude for my welfare. Yet it would take a pretty powerful jolt to convince him that I was a rival to be feared. He would mistake her attitude for anxiety over George Letcher; an anxiety partly real, partly feigned, for he solaced himself with the belief that she was "playing up" to Letcher just to "git him riled and jealous."

In Mankus's mind Letcher was the goat, and, therefore, the rest of us would be spared the effect of his peculiar jealousy for some time. But in the future I foresaw complications. If Mankus ever got it into his "dome" that I was trying to win the girl, and had a fair chance of success, I should find him a powerful and a relentless foe.

When darkness fell I went along the rocks toward Ulmquist's camp. It was a nasty trip through marsh and jungle. If all was fair in love, why must I be bound by a code which George Letcher as well as Mankus had already violated? Why was I taking all this trouble to save an unworthy rival for a girl whom I had hoped to deprive him of later? It was like betting two rival poker hands. I came to the conclusion that the time-honored adage, "all's fair in love," was originally invented by dishonor and shiftlessness to cover their own weaknesses.

Now comes the exciting part of my adventure! While floundering through a salt marsh, some distance inland, I thought I heard the sweep of oars. This suspicion was verified when I reached the neck of the promontory near Ulmquist's camp; for, instead of finding the two life-boats, there I saw but one boat.

At this point a low sand-bar fringed with betel palms received the shock of the surf and left a strip of comparatively calm water between it and the fern-covered ledges of rock. These ledges rose by easy stages to the foot of the cliff, a mile inland.

Ulmquist and most of the men had evidently gone off in the long-boat, leaving Poggio, Tack, and Omura to guard the supplies and the jolly-boat, which lay in the angle of the sand-bar, its painter fastened to a stick of driftwood thrust in the sand.

Wedged in a crevice of a handy rock stood a soup kettle; beneath it a fire of driftwood and newly cut timber had nearly burned itself out. There remained only the ends of a few green fagots and a generous pile of embers, the ruddy glow of which lit up the faces of the three men who squatted on blankets about it.

Poggio was leaning against his sea-chest, the lid of which had been propped open a few inches with a stick to make a head-rest. A ludicrously short clay pipe hung from his yellow teeth, and the soles of his bare feet were stretched out toward the fire. Tack, who lay near him, was naked from the waist up. He had scooped out a snug hollow in the sand, and spread his blanket in it.

At present he was engaged in the diverting pastime of chewing tobacco with great gusto and squirting the juice upward in the direction of the soup kettle; and whenever he succeeded in plastering its sooty sides with trickling saliva he wagged his woolly head and roared with tremendous glee at the idea.

Omura crouched at some distance. His little red dictionary peeped from his belt. He muttered to himself while he slowly stroked the tawny fur of Queechee, the ship's cat, which he had brought away with him, much against that fat and selfish creature's will.

I circled the fringing bushes and climbed through the banks of tall fern till near enough to hear what Poggio was talking about.

This I gathered: Ulmquist had just taken Letcher over to the point of the promontory in the hope of forcing him to disclose the whereabouts of the passengers and the provisions which they had brought with them. The whole crew was already suffering from a shortage of rations. Omura was in particularly bad odor for stealing an extra potato. Only to-night some tins of salmon had disappeared, and Ulmquist, blaming Omura, had threatened to kill him.

Most of the men feared to put out to sea without additional rations. They had circled the little island without finding a safe anchorage, natives, or means of ascending the cliff, and the land that lay southward seemed even more inaccessible than this barren coast.

"No, Tack," said Poggio, as he refilled his clay pipe with the unburned embers of his last three smokes. "Cappa Ul'queest tella me we going stay here till we find de grub, or catcha five hundred pounda feesh. But I teenk I know why he wanna stay here. He wanna find de very pretty *signorina*."

As this last profound observation of Poggio's was delivered without undue gesticulation and in a low tone between short puffs at his pipe, and as Tack was paying very little attention to what the Italian was saying, but was intent upon his own edifying avocations, he did not hear it.

To tell the truth, Tack had just succeeded, after two disheartening misses, in splashing the exact center of the kettle with an enormous gob of the red-brown juice, which trickled swiftly in five rivulets and fell upon the hot coals of the fire with an explosive hiss.

This astonishing performance, which illustrated aptly, strikingly, and triumphantly the truth of four or five laws of physics, appealed so irresistibly to Tack's well-developed sense of humor that he placed a sable fist between his two rows of ivories forthwith, and wagged his head in ecstasies while the crystal tears rolled down his ebony cheeks.

"Dat's a ringer! Dat's a ringer!" he gasped as soon as he could recover his breath. "Ah reckum dat makes seben drinks ob gin yo' owes me. Did yo' see dat monstrous ringer! Oh, man!"

"Sheesa no looka lika ringer to me," observed Poggio, squinting his eyes and shaking his head gravely. "Sheesa too lowa down."

"Oh, sho', man! Dat's de trickul! Dat's a fac'l Ah reckum dat gob ob juice done—"

"Alla right, you Tack, alla right," Poggio hastened to agree, an ingratiating note in his voice and compliance in his gestures.

"Sheesa joost one fine ringer. Now you going to shoot for me one bottle de red wine, one roasta pig with de garlic, and one beeg, fat cheese?"

At this enumeration of appetizing viands Tack's face convulsed spasmodically in a series of the most remarkable grimaces imaginable, and sitting up suddenly he pressed with both hands in the region of his stomach.

"Say, boy, doan' yo' tantalize dis yeah niggah dataway, yo' heah me?" he ejaculated sharply.

"Ain't you going shoot me for one beeg feast?" asked Poggio, the tears springing to his eyes from the potency of the nicotin in his clay pipe. "One beeg feast so quick lika we maka port?"

"Deed Ah is, boy! Deed Ah is!" cried Tack, licking his lips. "Roas' pig—dat's a barbecue! By golly, we gwine git a elegant roas' chickum, *too!* Dat's a swell joobilee, sure 'nuff! Oh, man!"

The tobacco-juice which had been accumulating under his tongue for the purpose of being ejected at the kettle in an attempt to secure another ringer, now drooled from the corners of his mouth and dripped on the handle of the shiny bolo at his belt till Tack, quite overcome at the prospect of the barbecue, threw back his woolly head and swayed with delight.

Poggio, noting the success of his effort to keep the negro in an ecstatic frame of mind, thereby binding him the more closely to himself, slowly rolled up his pants to the knees and began picking off the sand-burs which clung to the cloth.

"I teenk I know why Cappa Ul'queest wanna stay here," he said, reverting again to his original topic. "He wanna find de pretty *signorina*."

"Dat hoodoo woman!" cried Tack, becoming instantly serious and rolling his eyes with superstitious awe. "Dat hoodoo woman! Ah done tol' Cappen Ul'quis', by golly, she gwine bring berry bad debbil sickness if she come around here. Dat's what I done tol' him. Ah don' reckum Ah—"

"By God!" ejaculated Poggio, instantly all arms, "you stowa dat fool talk, you Tack. De voodoo was left on de Irene. De Señorita Gaylor sheesa look lika de Virgin Mary. I joost like see she coma here right now."

Tack rolled his eyes, wagged his head, and squirted tobacco-juice at the kettle, but made no reply.

"Dat leetle steward," said Poggio, raising his voice so that the latter could hear him, "heesa going be in hulluva fix when Cappa Ul'queest come back."

"By golly!" cried Tack, promptly forgetting the hoodoo woman, rolling his eyes, and fairly convulsing with laughter, "Ah doan' reckum he's gwine swipe no grub no mo'!"

Tack made an attempt as if to spit at the kettle, but missed it, and nearly struck the cat instead.

Omura sat up suddenly and darted a revengeful glance out of his alert eyes.

"Pliss, sair, you no touchem dis cat," he said sullenly. "I ketchum fish fer him chow. I not steal spud. I not steal chow. You make meestake, Meestair Tack. But Capitan Ul'quist t'ink I steal. He say he keel me. Pliss you tell him, Meestair Poggio, when he come back."

Again Tack spat at the cat and narrowly missed him.

"By God!" shouted Poggio hotly, gesticulating. "You stowa dat squirt, you Tack! Dat leetle steward heesa nice leetle fella. He never steala de chow. You an' me, you Tack, mus' joost tella Ul'queest hees gotta leave dat leetle steward alone. Ul'queest hees been boss joost 'bout long enough. Hees no good."

If one could have glanced beneath the stolid, sphinxlike expression which Omura's face now assumed, one might have detected a sneer at Poggio's too-transparent bid for the little steward's favor. Omura was willing enough to receive help from Poggio, but Poggio was badly fooled if he expected help in return. While on good terms with Ulmquist, Poggio had treated the little steward contemptuously enough, and now Poggio tried to ingratiate himself with Omura simply because Poggio was no longer sure of his own position. This was the reason for Omura's sneer, but he carefully concealed it.

I gathered that there had been some friction between Ulmquist and Poggio; the men were grouped roughly into two gangs; and if the trouble kept on simmering it might sooner or later result in an open rupture. I could well believe the wily Poggio was growing mortally sick of the sullen big brute whose too rapid rise to authority had made him arrogant.

This fresh situation promised to bear interesting fruit, but I had little time to digest it; for while Poggio was talking I heard the sound of oars, and presently the white prow of the long-boat emerged from the darkness.

"Here dey come!" cried Tack gleefully, starting to his feet. "I reckum dey got de grub—dat's a cinch!"

"Ul'queest been boss joost 'bout long enough," Poggio kept repeating. "Hees no good." Sticking his bare feet into his brogans, he rose and tossed some dry fagots on the fire, which blazed up cheerfully and threw a ruddy glow on the white lines of rolling surf and the strip of beach just as the boat reached it.

Ulmquist, who stood in the bow, sprang ashore, and turning to some one in the boat just behind him, jerked his arm as a signal to alight.

"By golly!" gasped Tack, his eyes rolling ridiculously, "it's Missy Gaylor—de hoodoo woman!"

What was my horror to see Dorothy rise from among the rough men in the boat and, ignoring the hand that Ulmquist stretched out to her, step daintily over the prow.

Jacques of the Thick Head



by William Merriam Rouse

FOR more than ten years the village of Belle Rivière had called him Jacques of the Thick Head. Not to his face, certainly, for Jacques Grondin commanded respect in spite of the uncomplimentary title which his own people had given him. A man who could put a barrel of flour on his shoulder without visible effort was worthy of respect, even if he did have less common sense than any other French-Canadian between Montreal and the Gulf. At thirty Jacques had become a proverb in his own parish.

Jacques's lack of sense, by him realized fully, had troubled him more or less for a long time; but on a certain day in the middle of a cold winter it became a danger. It threatened his happiness as one of the black storms of the north threatens the white world—impenetrable, omnipotent, bringing darkness and bone-searching cold.

He stood upon the heights overlooking Belle Rivière in winter sunlight which failed to sweep the shadows out of his thoughts, and hoped against certainty for some little trick of fate to relieve him. He knew that he was going to do a thing which might easily rob him of that which he most desired.

A hundred feet below lay the village, its stone walls pink and pale-green and white, according to the fantasy of the painter and the odds and ends of paint which must be

kept from waste. The roofs, buried under snow except for their dormer windows, slanted gracefully heavenward; and little trailing wreaths of smoke sauntered from broad chimneys.

Grondin loved the village almost as much as he loved the blue Laurentians at his back and the ice-locked St. Lawrence which went out toward the sea past the village and the misty heights of Cap Tourment. He was brother to the wind and snow and the keen, cold air. What misfortune to be afflicted with a disease of the spirit which repeatedly weakened him in the face of necessity—thus ran his thoughts!

"*C'est dommage!*" he muttered as he turned on his snow-shoes.

"What is a pity, my Jacques?"

The question came from behind him, and in a voice which, to his ears, had ever shamed the chimes of Ste. Anne de Beaupré. He turned quickly. Céleste Rigaud, to whom he was betrothed, was almost near enough to touch him—with a sparkle in her black eyes, and red in her cheeks, and a smile like dawn. She wore little caribou *chaussons* and a boy's mackinaw jacket instead of the flimsy moccasins and fancy coats which most of the village girls affected.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed. "You have learned to put your feet down like feathers—or was I asleep?"

"Dreaming of your good luck, my Jacques," she suggested, moving to his side. "Is it true, as they say, that you have bought a hundred cords of pulp wood for three dollars less than the regular price?"

"Yes." He refused to meet her eyes, preferring to stare off into the blue-and-white regions south of the St. Lawrence. "Old Didace Parent was glad to sell. He made a just profit. This year it is almost impossible to get men and teams to bring wood out of the mountains—and I have them."

"What luck for us!"

"But"—Grondin drew a breath that was very nearly a groan—"there is the matter of Henri Painchaud to be considered."

"Jacques!" Her voice rang sharply. "What folly are you going to do now?"

"You see," he began, trying to get hold of a much-rehearsed explanation, "Painchaud is not young any more, and he has a very old father and mother who are so feeble that they need a hired woman to look after them. He has had bad luck, and—"

"Tell me the worst of it first!" she demanded. "Are you going to give him the wood?"

"But, no!" protested Grondin. "Not at all! I am merely going to turn over the contract to him so that he can make the profit."

"I thought no one but you had the horses and men to handle it?"

"But, you see, he can take mine—"

"*Dieu seigneur!* It is a miracle of the good God that you have a house and clothes to wear!"

"Painchaud has had bad luck this year," he repeated, "and his father and mother are very old. What could I do?"

"It is true that Heaven has given you no sense at all!" The storm he had feared was gathering. "Charity, yes! But this is more folly than I believed even you knew how to commit!"

"It will help him through a hard winter," persisted Grondin. "There are doctors' bills—"

"Jacques Grondin!" She struck his bulging chest with a tiny mitten until he

looked her in the eyes. "Can he pay you back?"

"Eh, bien! He might."

"He might! *Mon Dieu!* Listen to me! Never after this day will I, Céleste Rigaud, speak to you, if you do this thing!"

Misery filled him like a great sickness. She was terribly angry or she would not have said it, and he knew that the anger would pass. But he also knew that she would keep to her word, even though it had been spoken when rage had made her forget their love.

He hesitated—for not to lie was a part of his madness—and as he hesitated, with blood pounding in his temples and a mist before his eyes, Céleste faded, and in her place he saw undersized Henri Painchaud, his cheeks sunken beneath a week's stubble, and his eyes with the look of a wounded rabbit.

"Painchaud is not a strong man"—Grondin licked dry lips—"and he has had bad luck!"

The mist cleared away, and he saw Céleste again—Céleste, whose warm, red mouth had said it would not speak to him. The wrath that had darkened her face had departed, leaving a questioning, speculative look.

"I said that I, Céleste Rigaud, would never speak to you after this day—is it not true?"

"My dear!" he pleaded huskily. "Painchaud is a little fellow—"

"Scoundrel!" she cried. "I am not talking about this Painchaud! If you do not marry me to-day, how can Céleste Rigaud answer the questions at the altar? Tell me that!"

Not in all respects was Jacques Grondin without sense. He swept her up in his arms with snow-shoes dangling, careless of who might be upon the roads—her arms laced about his neck.

"Oh, my Jacques of the Thick Head!" she murmured. "It is a terrible thing to love a man like you—but I cannot help it!"

So they were married before the sun went down that day, and Belle Rivière, which insisted upon knowing all the business of everybody, had something to talk about for months.

The gossips shook their heads. Certainly no good could come of such a helter-skelter marriage between a man with no sense and a girl whose temper was known to be that of the *chat sauvage*, even if the parents were willing.

For a time it seemed that the gossips were to be confounded, and Jacques Grondin prospered, and all went well. He and his wife wore fur coats such as few along the Côte de Beaupré could afford, and they kept a horse which was used for driving only.

It may have been that this prosperity was due to Grondin's having no opportunity to make a fool of himself for a time; anyhow, five years from his marriage he wrote his name on the back of a note for a friend and suffered as most such adventurers do. His house—and even the horse—went to made up the sum to be paid.

To the bitterness of the things which Céleste had to say he could make no reply. All through one summer night she stormed at him because of his folly; and he could do nothing save sit at the opposite side of the room and pretend to smoke.

Of course he would have given an arm, to spare her the privation and the hard work which must result, and he believed that his strength would in time win back what had been lost. But he felt now that there was something stabbing deeper into her heart than the physical loss. It was as though she had come to feel contempt for him—really to consider him such a fool as the shrewder men of the neighborhood thought.

He knew that he could not help his folly, for it was as deep-seated as a disease of the lungs, and he did not know how to explain his feelings to her.

After that long night of reproach the fortunes of the family Grondin remained stationary, or went lower, if they moved at all. Madame did not lose her dark and vivid beauty, and the great strength of Jacques became, if anything, better knit as he drew into the prime of manhood; but it seemed that the two of them were like horses which do not pull together. They made no progress; and into the mind of Grondin came more than once, and with

sadness, the words of Céleste on their wedding day: "It is a terrible thing to love a man like you!"

At last Jacques conceived a plan, quite patterned according to the direct and simple working of his mind, which would, at least, give him a start toward his old position of independence. Two days' march back into the mountains he took a contract to cut an amount of wood which needed three men's labor during the winter. He would do this alone, and thus, by the sheer power of his back and arms and the endurance of his lungs, he would accumulate more than three years' savings in one winter.

Without protest at leaving the village, Céleste went with him to the camp where they were to live alone, although she knew that she could not expect to go down to Belle Rivière to mass more than two or three times during the next ten months.

Their camp was larger and more comfortable than that of the average wood-chopper. The single room was fitted with a well-built table at one end and a broad bunk at the other. Under the roof, and in lieu of a ceiling, a thick mass of evergreens had been plaited and laid upon poles so that nearly all of the heat from the stove was conserved. The logs of the walls were hewn flat on the inside and whitewashed to a satisfactory degree of cleanliness.

Céleste seemed at least resigned to the winter, and Jacques, whose ax rang from the first break of dawn until early darkness, was of necessity occupied mainly by the needs of his body for food and sleep. One day was like another as the weeks passed, and at length, with February, the time drew near when teams would arrive to draw out the many cords of wood ranked up near the cabin. Then, when it appeared that the winter was to end tranquilly and exactly as Jacques had planned, the monotony of their life was broken.

In storm and fair weather Céleste carried a hot dinner to her husband in order that he might save a half-hour of working time. One clear, still day she came rather more hurriedly than usual, and Jacques knew, at first sight of her face, that there was news.

"After you have eaten," she said, setting

his dinner-pail down upon a stump, "come with me to the north of the camp—some one has been chopping there all the morning."

"Chopping?" he echoed. "But it is full of young poplar there, and Théophile Bedard, of whom I took this contract, said he would not have any of it cut for five years more!"

"Truly!" Mme. Grondin permitted more than a touch of sarcasm to creep into her voice. "Perhaps you will refuse to believe that any one is wicked enough to steal that poplar?"

"It could be done," replied Grondin slowly. "Drawn down by the road that goes on the other side of Grande Montagne, and no one would be any the wiser."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"Stop it!" he answered with decision; and as soon as he had eaten they set out.

Before they had traveled a quarter of an hour ax-blows came ringing out of the forest, and in a few minutes more they rounded a little knoll and saw a red-shirted chopper who had already cut down a dozen of the valuable poplars. He stood half-facing toward them, and Grondin recognized a man called Pierre Gagnon, of Belle Rivière—a man given to dealings which had several times brought him in danger of jail.

Telling Céleste to remain out of sight, Grondin walked toward him with no effort at concealment. A twig broke under one of his snow-shoes. Gagnon paused with his ax in mid air, guilt written plainly on his face. He let the ax down and stood with its head resting upon one of his *bottes sauvages*.

"*Sacré!*" he swore. "Jacques Grondin!"

"Yes," acknowledged Jacques. "How do you happen to be cutting poplar on the land of Théophile Bedard?"

"Bedard?" awkwardly. "Does this land belong to Bedard?"

"It does. What are you doing here?"

"There are three of us in a camp on the other side of Grande Montagne—we're going to cut sixty cords for a man in Ste. Anne de Beaupré." Gagnon was recovering from the effects of the surprise. "What have you got to do with Bedard's wood?"

"I've been here all winter, working for him."

"Alone?"

"Yes." He did not think it necessary to mention Céleste. Gagnon grew more and more assured.

"Name of the devil!" he exclaimed. "I don't know anything about Bedard's land—this is where we're supposed to chop, and I'm going on with it."

"You will stop now!" said Grondin quietly.

He slipped his feet out of the snow-shoe harness and advanced. Gagnon took a step backward and flung up his ax. Then Jacques, who had expected just that, leaped and caught the helve as the shining blade descended toward his head. He sent the ax flying twenty feet away, and seized Gagnon by the shoulders—had the man meant murder or had his movement been merely a threat?

For a moment he shook him until his head flopped on his shoulders. Then, almost gently, he lifted Pierre Gagnon and set him down with his face toward the direction of Grande Montagne.

"Go back to your camp," he commanded, "and if I see you or the others chopping here, I'll—I'll treat you worse than this!"

Without a word Gagnon shuffled off; while even in his own ears Grondin's words sounded foolish, like the threat of a small boy. And when he again faced Céleste, he read confirmation in her eyes.

"*Mon Dieu!*" she cried. "A man tries to kill you and you shake him! Thank Heaven he will suffer when Bedard knows of this!"

"But," protested Jacques, avoiding her gaze as they turned toward home, "Gagnon, you understand, has a dozen children. Théophile Bedard is a hard man—he would send him to prison because of the wood!"

"Prison! Certainly."

"But—"

"Jacques!" Céleste stopped and pulled at his sleeve until he faced her. "For ten years I have endured your folly! You might have been as rich as Bedard, and instead you are poor! Are you going to send word to him by the teamsters when

they come?—he will undoubtedly give you a reward—or are you going to let your thick head do us another injury?"

"I don't know," he answered slowly; and for the first time he admitted his dissatisfaction with himself. "I wish I were not such a fool!"

"It is the end for us," she said bitterly. "My father is still living and I have a home!"

In silence they walked back to the camp, and, while Céleste went inside, Jacques turned to the pile of firewood and worked furiously; he had no heart to go back to his chopping and he could not remain still. For the second time in their lives there was a sharp division of their ways, and now his instinct told him there would be no surrender on the part of his wife.

It was true that she had endured much. Yet he did not see how he could have done differently, from the time when he had befriended Henri Painchaud to the present day. Even the man whose note he had signed had been in desperate need. And thus, filled with impotent regrets, the afternoon wore on to a close.

It was dusk, and Grondin had driven his ax into the chopping block preparatory to going in for his supper when the clatter of snow-shoes striking against each other caught his ear; he looked up to see a man staggering toward him from the edge of the clearing. The man was old, as evidenced by the grayness of the beard that brushed his chest; and he was either ill or hurt or starving, for he swayed at each step, his head rolled helplessly and his arms hung limp and powerless. But in spite of his condition he managed to drag, by means of a rawhide harness about the shoulders, a loaded sled.

Grondin ran toward him, and at the first touch of his hands the old man collapsed, sinking down in a heap upon his snow-shoes. Jacques slashed away the harness and carried him into the cabin where Céleste, after the first exclamation of surprise, made ready their bunk. As Grondin put him down gently, he spoke one word, "Furs!" and then broke into a babble of delirium which had to do with the far north, and long marches, and dogs that had

had to be killed after a fight with a wild-cat.

"A trapper," said Jacques, after the man had been undressed and wrapped in blankets. "Many of them come down past Grande Montagne at the end of winter—it's a short route but a hard one."

"Look at his face!" Céleste touched lightly a small patch of flesh not covered by matted hair and beard. "He has fever—some kind of a sickness. And the man is half-starved!"

In the woods there is one kind of sickness which tries the souls of men more than any other. If this stranger was stricken with the dread scourge of smallpox, then those who helped him risked their lives. Jacques and Céleste looked at each other with the same fear and the same question in their eyes.

"I don't know," said Jacques, in reply to her unspoken question. "But if a red rash comes upon his body, then, God help us!"

"Whatever it is, he must be taken care of," said Céleste, as she turned to the stove where supper was cooking. "It is our luck."

Grondin remembered the sled outside, and in the growing darkness he unloaded it of two heavy bales and a canvas sack, all of which he carried into the cabin. The sack contained nothing but a meager cooking outfit and a piece of salt pork big enough to make one bite for a hungry man. But the bales, brushed free of snow and inspected in the lamp-light, set the heart of Jacques Grondin pounding.

"Céleste!" he whispered. "This man has a fortune in furs! Silver fox and mink and otter such as I never saw before!"

She gave up a vain attempt to make the sick man swallow some soup and shrugged.

"The fox skins alone are worth a fortune!" Jacques insisted. "If he lives he won't have to work any more!"

"*Eh, bien!*" she replied listlessly. "That is nothing to us!"

"No," agreed her husband, as he sat down to the supper which she carried to the table, "nor would I change places with him, for if I ever saw the mark of death it's on his face now!"

They were silent after that, Céleste sitting with her hands in her lap and making no effort to eat. As for Grondin, his great body demanded food, but he was no less miserable than his wife; more so, perhaps, for he felt that all the blame for the breach that had been made in their love belonged to him.

The good taste had gone out of the food quickly. He reached for his pipe—and became motionless with it half-way to his lips. Some one was lifting the latch on the cabin door. A click had caught his ear, then he saw the latch raised carefully, and even as Céleste's breathed "Jacques!" came to him the door burst open, and what seemed at first seemed like an avalanche of men swept inside.

Grondin leaped to his feet. The men—there were three of them—stood poised in the middle of the room. One was Pierre Gagnon, one was another worthless fellow of the same type named Maurice Laplante, and the third was a certain character of the St. Lawrence called Black Matthieu. A smuggler, people said, although he had never been caught. He was the first to speak.

"Where are the furs?" he demanded.

"What furs?" asked Grondin, seeking a little time.

His rifle was on the other side of the room, hung over the bunk where the stranger lay. His knife and belt were on the peg with his cap back of the stove. But each of the three visitors had knives, and the hand of Matthieu was upon his.

"You know what furs!" he barked. "We saw the old man when he stopped here—and afterward Laplante remembered him for a trapper of Belle Rivière. What would a trapper have but furs?"

"They're hidden under the bunk!" Gagnon shouted before Jacques could speak. "Let's get them and get out—nobody knows what disease the old fellow's got!"

At the cry from Gagnon, Black Matthieu turned his head. Only for a second did he take his eyes from Grondin, but that second was enough to give the giant his chance.

He caught Black Matthieu by the belt and the collar of his packet and swung him aloft until his back brushed the thatched

ceiling. Jacques felt the knife rip harmlessly through his shirt; and then he hurled his burden straight at Maurice Laplante, whose arm was already raised to strike. The two of them hit the log wall with a thud that jarred the building and sent down a rain of dried bits from the fir branches.

At the prick of a knife-point in his flesh, Jacques whirled—to see a stick of firewood in the hands of Céleste come down upon the head of Gagnon. The man dropped face downward, and the weapon slid from his fingers.

"Céleste!" cried Grondin between hard-drawn breaths. "You saved my life!"

"Perhaps!" She sat down rather weakly, although there was no hint of weakness in her flashing eyes. "But it will have to be saved again if you don't tie those pigs up! The one who looks most like a villain is already beginning to stir!"

Black Matthieu was trying to sit up. Grondin snapped a coil of rope from the wall and bound him hand and foot. Then he tied up the others and set all three with their backs against the wall.

"Parbleu!" he exclaimed. "What a foolish thing for them to do!"

"Foolish?" repeated his wife. "Foolish, when there's a fortune to be had for the taking?"

To this Grondin made no reply. He sat down on the bench by the table, blowing little spirals of smoke from his pipe and watching the prisoners. Gradually they recovered full consciousness, but no one of them spoke. It was Céleste who broke the silence.

"I'll start for Belle Rivière at daybreak," she said, "while you keep watch and take care of the sick man. I'll send back help from the first camp on the way, and we'll have these fellows in jail before the end of a week."

Jacques did not reply. Instead, he got up and gave a drink of water to the man in the bunk who, neglected through the excitement, had grown more restless in his delirium.

"They're going to jail, aren't they?" The voice of Céleste was like steel. "Tell me that!"

Grondin lifted a griddle from the stove

and put a coal to his pipe. He gazed down into the scowling face of Black Matthieu.

"It seems hard to put a man in jail."

"Truly!"

At her tone Jacques wriggled. He was apologetic, miserable, but impelled by a pity which mastered him.

"Gagnon has children, as I told you," he said. "Laplante is a young fellow, and they would take the best part of his life for a thing like this. As for Black Matthieu—*mon Dieu!* He is a tough bird, but certainly he has courage!"

"Courage! So you admire the black-guard? You will invite him to try robbery, and perhaps murder, again to-morrow?"

"But, no!" Jacques puffed furiously at his pipe. "I'll go over to their cabin to see if they have a rifle. Then I'll put the old man and his furs on the sled and we'll start. They won't dare to attack me in daylight, as I shall have at least my own rifle, and by night we'll be safe."

"Marvelous!" exclaimed Céleste. "Me, I am going to start for my father's house at dawn and leave you to your folly. For the present I'm going to sleep behind the stove!"

Gagnon laughed. Grondin got up deliberately and lifted his open hand as though to strike the prisoner across the face; then he let the arm fall and turned away.

"Hit him!" said Black Matthieu soberly. But Jacques shook his head and sat down again by the table, to smoke and watch his wife as she made a bed of blankets on the floor.

She lay down, and after a long time he knew that she slept. He got up, walking on tiptoe, and filled the stove. He gave another drink to the sick man before he went back to his seat.

In the dim light of the oil lamp, which he had turned down, Jacques saw that his prisoners were apparently dozing, their heads sunk on their chests. He resisted an impulse to loosen the ropes that bound them, telling himself sternly that he was growing to be more of a fool every day.

Certainly his wife was justified in going back to her father's home. He had lost her, just as he had failed in everything. If it were not for her safety, and the furs he

would let the robbers loose—let them take what revenge they wished on him. He had neither desire for life nor courage for the future.

He looked drowsily at his big silver watch and saw that it was midnight. That was the last thing he remembered until a kind of thrill went through him—one of those silent warnings that sometimes strike mysteriously into the sleep of a man and bring him up from the depths of fatigue with every sense at the alert. So Jacques Grondin's muscles were set for action even as his ears filled with the sound of shuffling feet and quick breathing. He opened his eyes upon a battle going on almost within reach of his hand.

Black Matthieu was locked in the arms of Gagnon and Laplante, who were on him like dogs on a wounded bear. All three had got their knives again—they were treading underfoot the ropes with which they had been tied. Matthieu held the others for the moment, but blood streamed from a cut on his head, and his knife-hand was raised and helpless in the clutching fingers of Laplante. They were still for an instant straining. Then steel flashed against Matthieu's dark shirt and a blade drove deep into his side. He went backward, pulling the other two down with him.

By that time Grondin was on his feet. He reached down, and his broad, thick hands closed upon the necks of Laplante and Gagnon. He lifted the men up with their tongues lolling from opened jaws and brought their skulls together with a crack like the report of a pistol. They sprawled into a corner and lay still.

Jacques knelt, and as he lifted the head of Black Matthieu, Céleste reached his side with a tin cup of water and a bottle of whisky *blanc*. She began to cut away the shirts of the wounded man. His lids lifted slowly and an expression that was almost a smile softened his face.

"You're a good fellow, Grondin!" he whispered. "That's why I was—a fool!"

"You save my husband," said Céleste. "I woke up just as they got the knives—and saw."

"Name of a name!" swore Grondin

brokenly as he lifted Matthieu and passed a bandage around his body. "You very nearly got yourself killed, my friend, and I am nearly of a mind to send those two devils to jail, after all!"

A smile sparkled about the eyes of Céleste, and the wounded man grinned in spite of his evident pain.

"Tie them up now," he advised faintly, "or you won't have a chance!"

He had just finished when Céleste called him, in a voice strangely gentle, to the bunk. The sick man lay now with the light of reason in his eyes; but upon his face was that dim grayness which is unmistakable to one who has once seen death.

"Jacques!" he breathed in a voice so low that they had to bend down to hear. Grondin brought the lamp, trying in vain to learn what former acquaintance was hidden behind that tangle of dirty gray beard and hair.

"My lungs, Jacques," said the dying man. "Not smallpox!"

"Who are you?" asked Grondin.

"Me; I am Henri Painchaud. The wood—ten years ago—"

"Henri!"

"But, yes! Always I have dreamed of doing something for you, Jacques! Keep the furs, and *le bon Dieu* bless—"

The benediction remained half-spoken, for Henri Painchaud was called to travel the dark road which Grondin himself might have taken that night but for Black Matthieu.

Jacques turned away, fumbling mechanically for his pipe. He did not see the whitewashed walls of the cabin; he scarcely felt the touch of his wife's hand upon his arm. For the first time in his life men had praised him to his face—one of whom had been about to go to the good God and who must therefore speak truth!

"My Jacques!" The words of Céleste came to him through a ringing in his ears. "Will you believe me when I say that Black Matthieu and Henri Painchaud have put light in my soul? It is my head that has been thick these many years!"

The Manner in which It Is Said

THE simpler a man can be in his greatness, the greater he is; and the simpler the expression of a truth, the more universal its appeal, principally because it is the more easily understood. Therefore, since fame is measured largely by the number of people one can get to notice one's existence, it would seem to be of first importance that the aspirant for recognition make himself as understandable as possible, so that the *most* of the people will the more easily be able to appreciate what he is trying to do or say.

Which applies to stories as much as to anything else.

Style in writing, as with style in clothes, is merely a matter of taste. But—to instance the most prevalent inclination of all sorts of writers—it has always seemed to me that when a man feels the need of long-winded paragraphs, rather loud-mouthed metaphors, and ponderously syllabled words to give vitality to the tale he is trying to tell, he is in much the same case as the South Sea Islander who sticks a ring through his nose to draw attention to himself. The South Sea Islander unquestionably gets the attention he craves, but the ring through his nose actually gets more attention than he does; and every one will admit that the nose would be a much better nose without the ring.

"The more we know, the more we know how little we know."

No truth could be much simpler or more mightily true than that. It is credited to Socrates, the foremost of the ancient Grecian wiseacres, who, by the way, never wrote a single line. He said a great deal, however, and said most of it better than it had been said before or has been since. Plato wrote down as much of it as he could remember, and proved himself not only the exponent of an enduring philosophy, but a first-class reporter and press-agent as well. Nevertheless, even if Plato had written nothing else, his account of the death of Socrates would surely have immortalized them both, not because it is garnished with grandiloquence and erudition, but because it is a simple story, simply but most eloquently told.

In the nakedness of simplicity and naturalness there is a world of power. Adornment of any sort is always a confession of weakness.

Texas Fever

by Charles V. Barney

CHAPTER XVIII—(Continued).

THE URGE OF A DREAM.

AS Mary Ann gazed down upon the form of her husband he looked so gigantic stretched on the ground she wished she had married a smaller man or that she had more than a woman's strength. For she had determined to get him upon her horse.

The poor beast was almost dead for want of water. There was no near-by stream and the animal had had nothing except the moisture that he had licked as he grazed on the leaves and short grass that grew close to where he was tied. Mary Ann had not dared to hobble him and leave him even that much freedom because she felt that in the horse lay their only hope of reaching Nacogdoches.

She attempted to rouse Fred from his stupor, but it was useless. She then got to her feet and covered her shaking limbs with the garments which had been over her husband during the night. She ate breakfast, which made a sad hole in the provisions she had brought with her. But she was ravenously hungry and now that she had got the chilled blood to circulating in her veins she felt equal to anything. However, another look at Fred made her doubt her powers.

"Still," she comforted herself, "the good God who has helped me so far will not desert me now. Only I wish I had two horses instead of one."

She brought her own horse close beside Fred, and roused him sufficiently, so that he could aid her a little; and so with infinite

difficulty, she succeeded at last in getting the body of the man she had so unselfishly cared for, upon the back of the horse. Once there she tied him in place. She knew that she was hurting the poor sufferer, but he seemed to realize that she was doing all she could for his benefit, because he made no outcries and seemed to strive to wince and groan as little as possible.

Sometimes he would open his eyes and look vaguely about him, but there was no recognition for her or anything else in their glassy depths. The struggles of mounting had caused Fred's wounds to break open, and Mary Ann was terrified to see the widening spots that soon completely covered the bandages.

However, she strove not to look at them and, leading the horse, she turned her face toward home. At the first stream she watered the poor animal and resumed the journey. She had her compass and felt sure that it would prove a trusty guide. But the big question was could Fred live to make the journey?

She hoped so, she earnestly prayed so; but at such times the candle of faith burns low and Mary Ann was far from being a devout person. She had learned to pray as she had learned to read and do sums in arithmetic, but even Thetis Carrington had found fault with the girl's knowledge of mathematics!

The day wore on. Mary Ann was certain that she suffered more than the man tied on horseback beside whom she tramped. But, alas! she did not have the blessed balm of unconsciousness to relieve her sufferings.

When the sun began to reach such a position that traveling beneath its rays seemed dangerous, Mary Ann unstrapped her precious burden and eased his descent to the ground. She was enraptured to find that the wounds bled very little during this operation. She hoped she was learning better how to handle her patient. And she was; for, in the cool of the afternoon when she again bore her burden to his place upon the horse, she found that she had managed matters with much greater comfort to Fred and with less strain to herself.

All that afternoon and all that long night they went forward. There was a little moon which came up early and aided her in finding her way across the prairies. Not a single human creature did she see, although often in the thicket she would startle small animals and in the open she passed several droves of wild ponies and more than once encountered feeding herds of buffalo, which took not the least notice of her.

In the early morning, more dead than alive, but with an infinitely thankful heart, she arrived in Nacogdoches. No one was awake yet and she went, unescorted, toward the inn.

The man-bound to the horse was still burning with fever and looked as though he had been dead, buried, and dug up; but he was still alive. And Mary Ann realized that whether he lived now or died, she had done what she could.

She hitched the horse and staggered into the big room.

"Help, help!" she cried.

Several men who were sleeping here sprang to their feet. One of them caught at her as she swayed drunkenly on the threshold. To Mary Ann in her pitiful state it all seemed a dream. For Colonel Carrington was beside her and so were Hamilton and the two Rogers boys. She would not have been surprised if Neil had also appeared.

"Why, how did you escape?" the old man cried.

"Escape?" she repeated as she almost fainted in the old friendly arms.

"Yes, weren't you abducted?" Hamilton cried.

"Abducted?" Mary Ann muttered.

"Abducted? Everybody is crazy. Fred outside—somebody help me—h-e-l-p!"

Then unconsciousness wiped out everything.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE BALANCE.

WHEN Mary Ann came to herself, Thetis Carrington was bending over her. The first words to escape the young woman's lips were: "Where is he?"

"Where is who, dear?"

"Fred—my husband?"

"He's quite safe, child. Be quiet. Lie still. You have been very ill. Lie still." Thetis attempted to hold the girl upon the bed.

"Where is he?" Mary Ann cried again, struggling to get up.

"He's over there," Thetis waved vaguely.

"The doctor says he will get well. You are the one—you have scared us far more than he has."

"I?" Mary attempted to remember. "Abducted!" she muttered. "Who is abducted?" A puzzled expression came into her pinched face.

"We thought you were," Mrs. Carrington explained, "but all that can wait. You must lie still and be quiet. You almost died."

"Died?" Mary Ann quavered. "What makes me so weak? When was all this?"

"Four days ago. Now do be quiet and sleep." Mrs. Carrington seated herself on the side of the bed.

Mary Ann remained silent for a short time, then she opened her eyes again and asked: "What is this about my being abducted? I must know," she persisted. "I cannot rest until you tell me."

Thetis decided that it would be less exciting to tell the girl than to allow her to fret over the matter. Besides, the old woman placed little faith in the abduction story; she thought it was largely a figment of her husband's rather romantic brain.

"It's like this," Mrs. Carrington began. "The morning we arrived we found the inn in confusion. Mr. Bailey, just before day, had heard a noise in your room and investi-

gated. You had disappeared and your window had been forced open and a ladder was placed against the wall. No one could imagine what had become of you. There was confusion in the room where you had slept, although nothing was stolen—your watch was on a chair beside your bed. The door leading into the hall was ajar. It all seemed so mysterious and, of course, dear old Charles was certain that you had been carried off. It was too silly." She patted the girl who stared fixedly at the wall. Thetis did not tell her that shots had been exchanged and that Mr. Bailey believed he had mortally wounded the man he had found in Mary Ann's room, and who had succeeded in escaping in spite of his wounds.

"Now, everything is all right," Mrs. Carrington went on, "so go to sleep."

Mary Ann heaved a deep sigh and closed her eyes, but in a moment she opened them once more.

"It doesn't matter," she murmured, "nothing matters if *he* is safe. Are you sure Fred is all right?"

"Yes, perfectly certain," the older woman assured her.

But Mary Ann was not yet satisfied: "Promise me that he is still alive and being taken care of—promise me."

"I do give you my solemn word." Thetis leaned over and kissed the flushed face. "Now go to sleep."

Mary Ann sank into a troubled stupor and remained apparently unconscious until late that afternoon. Thetis remained with her most of the time and when the young woman again came to herself she found Mrs. Carrington beside her.

"I feel better," the girl announced.

"I am so glad, my child."

"I want to talk with you a little," Mary Ann pleaded.

Her nurse made no spoken response, but leaned close over her.

"It has all been so terrible," Mary Ann began. "I thought you were captured by the Indians and—and—was it all a dream?"

"It certainly was not," Mrs. Carrington explained. "We were captives; but, for some undiscoverable reason, we were given our liberty; and, as we started home we came upon your husband and all the rescue-

party. Fred and Steve Rogers and two other men, who were both killed by the Indians, left us to go to the scene of our battle with the savages and—"

Mary Ann interrupted: "But Steve Rogers was down-stairs. I saw him when I first came into that room the other—"

"Yes, I know," Thetis interposed. "He had been with Fred and he thought that your husband was killed. He just escaped with his own life, after a terrible race for it. He got in late the night before you staggered in. After Steve had slipped through the Indians' fingers, he got lost and had an awful time. He and the others were to leave the first thing that morning, to search for Fred. But you, brave little girl, came in with your husband."

She ceased speaking because she saw by her quiet breathing that the sufferer was asleep.

Mary Ann was very ill, but after three more days she was well again, only very weak and pale. Frederick Pope was not so fortunate. He hung between life and death for many days, although after Mary Ann came to nurse him, which she did on the sixth day, he began to improve.

She watched over him carefully, scarcely leaving his side except to eat. And when she slept it was on a pallet made of two buffalo robes spread close beside his bed.

When the minister, Dr. Crabb, who was also a physician, heard the tale of Fred's rescue, he declared that it was only the way in which Mary Ann had cared for his wounds and drawn the poison from them that had saved the man's life.

Long since the party had returned from their vain attempts to locate the Comanches. They easily found where they had been camped, beside the stream; but the savages had departed, leaving no trail. Leonidas Carrington had been forced to return, empty-handed, with them; and no one could understand what made him so different. He seemed disconsolate, was exceedingly restless; and eagerly seconded his father's impatient proposals that they again set out for their new home in the Red Lands.

For the Carringtons were actually contemplating going out on that same journey which had already cost them so dear. It

seemed almost unbelievable, but such is the dauntless spirit of pioneers; and the Texas fever still raged in the Carrington blood. They had no intention of leaving the country; even Thetis would have scoffed at such an idea, but it was never once proposed by any of them.

They collected fresh supplies and household goods; buying them from other settlers or travelers who stopped at the inn on their way to various parts of the province.

"You will come out, too, as soon as you are well enough to travel?" Thetis asked of Fred Pope on the morning of their departure.

"Of course we will," Mary Ann responded for him. In her also the Texas fever was still running its course.

In great spirits the Carringtons departed, accompanied by the two Rogers boys. They went as though there was not the slightest danger in their journey. Nothing had been heard of Indian attacks and depredations for some time. The country seemed quiet. "But," Mr. Bailey threw out as a comforting bit of information to his departing guests, "the Comanches and Apaches don't leave no opportunity for robbing or murder to pass 'em by in their sleep. They are ever ready for villainy."

Her patient required Mary Ann's almost constant attention. The doctor declared him out of danger, but he did not seem to regain his strength. His wounds were slow to heal and were easily infected.

Mary Ann declared that she was going to take over the case herself. She believed that the physician was too devout an advocate of the lancet. He insisted upon bleeding Fred every other day. Mary Ann thought that this was too often and told the doctor so. They had quite a scene; and, when the young woman persisted in her determination not to allow Fred's veins to be opened again, Dr. Crabb threw up the case and departed in a rage.

However, he came again the following day and seemed surprised to find that Fred was still alive. He continued his daily visits and Fred began steadily to improve. Often now Mary Ann could leave him and get a little much-needed recreation in the fresh air.

Slowly, she was coming to know her husband better, to understand him and to appreciate him. The bigness and frankness and fearlessness of his nature were an endless surprise to her. Yet, in his quiet way he always attempted to keep her from thinking him different from others.

Often he would talk to her of his early life and she began to suspect that the way in which he had been held under was responsible for his being such a strangely unresponsive person. She was beginning to doubt Thetis's theory that he was "loved out."

One day she asked Fred how many sweethearts he had had, and was not surprised, but very delighted, to learn that she was his first and only love.

She accused him of not loving her at all; and to this he replied, just as he had long ago, that he was not a romantic sort of person.

"I love you, of course," he said simply, "but not in a wild way. That sort of thing is not in me, that's all. I wish for your sake that it was."

She was not to be appeased so easily and remarked: "But when I'm out of your sight, I always think that I'm out of your mind. You remember how you forgot me when we went on that buffalo-hunt, that first day we were married; and then again when you went hurrying off after Neil's murderer, without taking the time to say 'good-by'?"

"Yes," he responded, "I remember." And he added sadly: "And I wonder what ever became of Jude—oh! I would like to have made the yellow devil pay for that innocent boy's death—"

"There you go again!" she broke in. "I ask you how you could have forgotten me like that, and you begin at once to think about somebody else!"

He took her small hands in one of his big ones.

"Dear little girl," he said, "it's like this, I'm afraid: Love to me is not all of life. Even, entirely without it, I think I could get on fairly well. To lots of people it means everything in the world—it is the ultimate end for everything they do. But with me it is just a part; a very beautiful,

sweet part; but not everything! I love you and all that, but I think I could live without you; and, when other big things come, I do not cease to love, I just—well, I just go on to them."

"And leave me to shift for myself," she added with a trifle of scorn and bitterness in her voice.

"No, not exactly that," he corrected, kissing her pouting lips, "but those other things need me the most. If you had been in any danger I would have remained with you."

She thought this would be a good time to tell him of De Cardac; and so she did. She confided to him the entire story. She told how she had once loved De Cardac and how, that day, when he had passed the caravan she had been frightened into asking Fred to marry and protect her. She went on and told him that she had been divided in mind when she saw Paul again; she had scarcely known whether she still loved him or not.

"Yes," Fred propped himself on his elbow and looked fixedly at his wife, "yes, I think I understand. He is the impetuous lover and I'm rather a snail. But, dearest, I have a strong feeling that my love will last and that other—well, that other is a sort of a fire of straw."

He sank back on his pillows, and to her complete astonishment, in a few minutes was asleep! She bit her lip. Would it always be like this, she wondered? This sudden way in which this man could go from the most intimate conversation with her to something far removed—this time to sleep!

She resented the fact that he had showed not the slightest jealousy when she spoke of Paul. He took everything in such a matter-of-course sort of way. She was both irritated and hurt.

She sat beside him for a long time thinking; and then she decided that after all she could not hope to make of Fred Pope something which he was not. He was, that should be enough for her. He loved her, in his own way, and she should be satisfied with her state.

But there was a great longing within her which was growing day by day; for, un-

suspected by herself, she was falling very much in love with this patient, self-contained and intensely masculine invalid.

She had seen nothing more of De Cardac since that one night when she had introduced him to her husband; and, although she had once or twice made timid inquiries, she had received no information. No one seemed to know anything about the handsome young creole.

And, for the very simple reason, that Paul was no longer in Nacogdoches. He had left, long since, after that one desperate attempt he had made to carry her off. For it was he who with the aid of the unknown mulatto had forced her window-shutter and climbed into her room only to discover that she had disappeared. And as they departed the mulatto had received what proved to be nearly his death-wound.

Paul de Cardac was not a bad man, but he was weak and now he was blindly, wildly in love and his imperious nature was one that could not brook denial. He had encountered the mulatto again and in a burst of desire had carefully planned the abduction.

It was upon the failure of this attempt that he had learned that the mulatto, with whom he was plotting, was the murderer, Jude, for whom the country was still vainly seeking. The young man was horror-stricken by the contemplation of the sort of company he was keeping; and, although he did not attempt to hand Jude over to the authorities, he did sever his connections with the fellow. This was very easy because Jude had mysteriously disappeared as he leaped, howling with pain, from the ladder beneath Mary Ann's window. Paul knew no more about him. He presumed that the mulatto was in hiding, nursing his wounds. De Cardac made a few cautious inquiries, but other than to discover Jude's identity learned nothing. And then he shortly after departed for Mississippi.

Arriving in Natchez, he went at once to Mr. Sims to see what could be done to get Mary Ann away from her present environment. Mr. Sims quietly informed him that nothing could be done, Mary Ann was of age, and besides she was married.

"And," Mr. Sims commented, "to the

sort of man who seems to be quite capable of holding on to that which belongs to him."

CHAPTER XX.

A GIANTLY FIND.

IN due course Fred grew strong enough, he fancied, to permit of the departure of himself and Mary Ann for their new home in the Red Lands. They took with them a negress named Polly. With infinite difficulty they had secured the services of this woman, not that Polly did not wish to work for them, but servants were hard to find in Texas.

This one, Mary Ann declared, she had positively *stolen* from Mr. Bailey, in whose employ the negress had been for three years.

The Carringtons had promised to let them have two of their men until they got things running. Indeed, Thetis had planned to have the house all in readiness to receive them, but Mary Ann and Fred were arriving more than a month ahead of time. They journeyed across the prairies without any adventures or mishaps. The Carringtons had made various trips back and forth to Nacogdoches, and had marked out a shorter and easier way than they had pursued on their first fatal journey. Fred and Mary Ann had a little drawing of this new route, and availed themselves of it, with the result that they arrived at their log house on the third day after leaving Nacogdoches, and they had traveled slowly, too!

Fred had stood the trip very well, and they were both in great spirits at the prospect of eating before their own hearthstone. Early the next morning the Rogers boys rode over to see them; they had observed the smoke from Fred's chimney and, suspecting his premature arrival, came to wish him welcome.

Since Fannie's death the brothers were living together in a little cabin which they had built for themselves on the edge of a small pool. Their land lay between the property of the Carringtons and that of the Popes.

Steve said that he knew the entire Car-

rington tribe would come over to visit them that evening.

"How far away are they?" Mary Ann inquired.

"A little more than five miles: but our house is on the way, and that is less than two. Fred, you must get strong soon and come and help us," Steve continued. "We are building a blockhouse for our common protection against the Indians."

"What about the Indians?" Mary Ann asked apprehensively.

"Oh, they are quiet—have been ever since we arrived. They come around sometimes, begging, but they are friendly," Ed declared.

"Never trust a friendly Indian," Steve began. "Ed is too trusting, I think—"

Mary Ann broke in by asking: "Where is the blockhouse being built?"

"Just half-way between your place and the Carringtons; in other words, two and a half miles from all of you folks, but only about three-quarters of a mile from us." And Steve laughed: "We don't have to ride to our work."

After a certain time had been spent in conversation of a more or less trivial nature, the Rogers boys returned to their work on the little fort, and Fred and Mary Ann began their unpacking. Their house consisted of one big room with a dirt floor, and above this were two small rooms reached by a ladder.

"It's terribly crude," Fred commented, "but we'll soon build a shed close by for a kitchen. First, though, we'll have some stairs made and put in the place of that ladder."

"And who will do all this?" Mary Ann demanded sharply. "You certainly are not strong enough. I tell you we should not have come out here so soon!"

Fred thought so himself, but he made no remarks to that effect.

That evening the Carringtons and the Misses Lord came to call, and they all passed a very pleasant time. Even Melissa was less catty than usual, perhaps because every one left her alone to flirt to her heart's content with Steve Rogers.

Hamilton announced that he and three negro men would come over early the next

morning and do the necessary carpentry work about the place.

"I wish Leonidas were here," he continued. "He's the best man with his hands."

"Where is he?" Fred inquired.

"Gone to hunt his Indian sweetheart," one of the twins announced with glee.

"What's that?" Mary Ann exclaimed in surprise.

Then Thetis told her the tale; how Leonidas had moped about, and no one could discover what ailed him; and that finally she had got at the truth. He was desperately in love with one of the squaws of the Comanches—Hailstones was her name.

"One of those terrible savages that fell upon our cavern," Thetis explained. "How he could ever have done it, I can't see. He wanted to go and seek out the girl, and he went. How he ever expects to find her, or how he will ever get her, are things quite beyond me. Every day I imagine him killed in some new way. It's awful to conceive the thought."

"Besides, it will be worse when he gets the girl and comes home with her. One doesn't care to receive into one's heart the leader of a band of Indians who murdered one's son and daughter, not to mention the servants and—and—"

Thetis paused for breath, and Mary Ann asked:

"Couldn't you do anything to stop him? Couldn't you talk to him?"

"Talk to him?" the Misses Lord cried in chorus. "Talk—she talked herself blue in the face, and she pleaded, and she wept, and she got sick and threatened to die! What was there that she didn't do?" They raised their hands appealingly to the ceiling.

"When did all this happen?" Fred wanted to know.

"About ten days ago," Colonel Carrington announced, and there was a certain amount of pride in his voice as he added: "You know, I think the boy did just right. But, all the same, I hope he doesn't ever find her."

"Then he'll never return to us," his mother wailed. "But, come, we must go. These poor children must go to bed." She

did not explain whether she meant the twins or Fred and Mary Ann.

However, the party broke up, and soon the little two-story log cabin was dark and quiet and the young couple asleep.

Now began a quiet, tranquil, almost idyllic period in the lives of Mary Ann and Fred Pope. They had a great deal of work to do, and they did it. At night they were often so weary that they went to bed with the sun. Up again with the first streak of day, they began their tasks.

They were happy in their strenuous life, and happy with one another. Weeks passed. Fred grew strong, and Mary Ann felt herself becoming a typical pioneer's wife. She spent all the time that she could spare from her duties on the prairies, in the midst of which their house was located. Usually she went on foot, and would wander only a short distance from the house and lie down in the tall grass and, closing her eyes, turn her face up to the sun.

Then came the winter, and although there were many days when they were forced to keep close, there were many other times when, warmly clad, she could sit or lie in the shelter of the tall gray-and-brown grass.

There was an old ruined mission about ten miles distant that she always rode to when time afforded, although Polly attempted to keep her from going to these ruins, declaring the local superstition that they were haunted by the ghost of some one who been murdered and dropped into the old well.

Fred objected to her riding about on the prairie, for he feared that once on horseback she would venture too far and either get lost or encounter some danger. The Indians had so far given them no trouble. Often they saw them on the verge of the prairies, hunting or catching ponies; great galloping herds of these mustangs were an almost daily sight.

Mary Ann had grown accustomed to receiving visits from friendly savages who were cold and hungry and came for food or anything they could get.

Often they brought something with them which they offered in exchange, but these things were usually worthless.

One day she had been amused when an Indian youth of, perhaps, sixteen years had brought her a half-frozen, live rabbit with a wounded foot. She did not want the creature, but realized that since she must give the trader something she might as well take the animal. She did so, and cooped up the creature in the big room down-stairs. That night it disappeared.

Imagine her surprise when the next day the same Indian returned with the same rabbit and unblushingly offered it to her again. She at first thought that the boy had found it and was returning her property, but she was soon undeceived.

He had stolen it. Polly swore that she had seen him sneak it away, late in the afternoon, when Mary Ann had been off on one of her frequent visits to the Carringstons.

Mary Ann refused to repurchase the rabbit; but, as the Indian looked cold, she poured out a glass of home-made wine and offered it to him. He refused, and, knowing the savages' weakness for liquor in any form, she was surprised. She attempted by signs to induce the boy to drink it, but he shrank from her and crouched in a corner, glaring at her and at the tiny glass with its dark-red contents.

"Well, you are a funny boy," she murmured, although she knew that the Indian could not understand a word.

She raised the glass to her own lips, not wishing to see the wine wasted. Instantly the youth sprang upon her and, snatching the glass from her fingers, he drained it, and then, with a grunt, dashed for the door, taking his rabbit with him.

Mary Ann at once grasped the significance of the episode: the youth had believed that the wine was poisoned, and it had not been until she tasted it that he was reassured.

Suddenly it broke over her why the Indians so hated the whites, and why they attacked them for no apparent reason except just because they *were* whites! It had taken a great amount of deceitful dealing and treachery on the part of the white man to make such simple creatures as this boy believe that a glass of wine, hospitably offered to him, was poison.

On another occasion she had been over at the home of the Rogers boys, where she and Polly had gone to aid in the making of some soap. This was considerably later—in the spring. While the big pot of soap was boiling, an old Indian and his son, a youth of perhaps twenty, had silently watched the proceedings. Finally, after some few words grunted among themselves, the boy, who was a magnificent specimen of youthful strength and grace, came forward and made it evident that they wanted some of the stuff that was cooking in the pot. They wished to eat it!

Mary Ann attempted to convey the information that the boiling substance was not intended for food. The Indian, however, seemed to think that she was trying to tell him that it was not to be eaten while it was hot.

She was inclined to laugh at the whole thing, but the young fellow was insistent, and made every effort to inform her that the much-desired delicacy was not for himself, but for the old man, his father.

She attempted to divert him by offering other things—things that were really good to eat; but the youth would have nothing. He grew more vehement in his demands. He was now thoroughly convinced that the whites would not part with the soap because it was so wonderfully desirable.

Finally, Steve Rogers, who had just come out of the house, learning of the commotion, cried:

"Let the fools have some! It will do them good to learn that they should listen to us whites when we say no."

"But I'm afraid that when the old man tastes it, he will be very angry, and that may make trouble," Mary Ann demurred.

"Let me catch them making any trouble around here!" Steve announced pugnaciously.

He went over and dipped out some of the boiling soap, and, filling a bowl with it, was about to hand it to the Indian. But the boy was quicker than he, and snatched the bowl from Steve and ran with it to the old man.

Then began a period of blowing and grunting among the Indians. Meanwhile the whites looked on with interest. Final-

ly the soap was sufficiently cooled, and the old man raised the bowl to his lips and took a great gulp.

He choked, attempted frantically to expel the soap from his mouth, but some of it had slipped down his throat. He gagged, and the stalwart youth looked on anxiously, ready to render any assistance that might be necessary.

He was quivering with fear and excitement. The old man was a pitiable object for a few moments, but Steve Rogers did not restrain his laughter; and, although Mary Ann succeeded in keeping her face straight, Polly guffawed loudly.

The old Indian clung to the bowl throughout all his troubles, but when he was quiet he raised it above his head and then viciously dashed it to the ground, where it smashed into little bits. The old fellow turned and darted a venomous look at the laughing white man, then stalked proudly away, and in his trail glided the youth.

Mary Ann did not learn until some time afterward that the old man had died the next day of some intestinal trouble that had been troubling him for some time; and the youth, believing that his father had been poisoned by the witch-broth of the whites, swore vengeance upon Steve.

After making the soap, Mary Ann went home, and took Polly with her; but they forgot and left one of their pots at Steve's house. They intended to return and get it the next day, but were prevented by some trivial hindrance, and it was not until the second day after that Mary Ann, accompanied by the black woman, rode over to get the missing pot.

Meanwhile, Steve Rogers forgot all about the old Indian and the soap incident. On the same day, indeed at about the same time that Mary Ann started toward his house, Steve decided to take a swim in the big pool that was directly behind his cabin. He wanted to make Ed come with him, but Ed was busy dressing himself to go to see the Carringtons.

He seemed to be attempting very hard to cut out his brother in the affections of Melissa. The matter was quite a joke with the little community, and Melissa seemed to enjoy the rivalry that she had aroused,

although part of the fun was spoiled because everybody knew that she was engaged to Steve and that soon they were to be married.

"Better come on in for a swim," Steve called as he left the little log house which consisted of a single big room.

"No," Ed laughed back. "I'm going to see *our girl*."

Steve departed alone, taking his gun with him, and Ed continued with his toilet. At the end of about twenty minutes Ed heard his brother calling for help; and, a moment afterward, the air was rent by the whoop of a savage.

Ed snatched up his gun and dashed in the direction of the pool, which was less than a hundred yards away. As he ran he saw three redskins scampering up the bank on the far side of the pool. Although they were too far away, he fired at them as they disappeared in the woods that hugged the far bank.

As he ran Ed called frantically to his brother, but there came no response. When he reached the pool, there lay Steve naked and bloody.

Ed rushed up to him, and a most awful sight met his eyes. Steve had not only been murdered, but he had been scalped! Three knives had been plunged into his heart. He was dead, but his limbs still jerked and twitched. The miserable man had evidently been scalped while he still lived.

Ed Rogers went blind with fury, and, forgetting everything, dashed for his horse; he left his brother's body by the side of the pool, sprang into his saddle, and started in pursuit of the murderers.

Within ten minutes after he had left, Mary Ann and Polly arrived, and were surprised to find both the brothers away and the house open. She decided that both men were bathing in the pool, and she left Polly to fetch the pot from inside the house while she mischievously crept down to surprise the brothers at their bath.

She came upon the murdered body and screamed. Polly came running, and between them they got the corpse up to the house.

They could not imagine what had happened, and both were fearful lest this be

the prelude to a massacre of the little settlement. Mary Ann was wild to go and warn Fred and the Carringtons of the threatening danger.

But when, with their ghastly burden, they had almost reached the house, an arrow whizzed by her, she urged Polly to haste. In a few moments they were safe inside the cabin, and rushed to bar the door and windows.

Peeping through the cracks, they saw an Indian glide up close to the house. It was the son of the man who had eaten the soap. Even then Mary Ann did not connect the murder of Steve with the discomfiture of the old savage.

But she did wish that she had brought either her pistol or rifle with her. It was almost an unheard-of thing for her to venture forth without one or the other; but Steve's house had seemed so near, and there had been absolutely no trouble of any kind since she and Fred arrived in the Red Lands, and she had become careless.

In fear and trembling she and Polly searched the house, but found no weapon. The Indian seemed to have disappeared, but they did not know at what minute he might return and lead an attack upon the hut.

They busied themselves in washing and dressing the poor, mutilated body, then they seated themselves and waited. The night came on and, not daring to make a light, lest it attract the shots of the Indians, they sat in darkness with the corpse of the murdered man between them.

The night wore on; from time to time they thought they heard footsteps creeping about the house, but they could not be sure. They spoke sometimes, but always in subdued whispers, and suffered agonies of suspense. Mary Ann did not know but that even now her own home was in ruins and Fred and their friends slaughtered. She wondered where Ed Rogers was, and feared that perhaps he might be dead beside the pool and had been overlooked by them when they hastened toward the house with Steve's body.

In this gruesome silence then they sat all night long, and when daylight came Mary Ann determined that she would risk

everything and attempt to get to Fred and, if it were not already too late, warn him and have him warn the Carringtons of the actions of the Indians.

CHAPTER XXI.

CONSPIRATORS.

PAUL DE CARDAC was not inclined to agree with Mr. Sims that nothing could now be done about Mary Ann. The more he thought about her, the more he determined that, married or not, he must get possession of her.

Paul de Cardac's nature now underwent a strange transformation—a transformation so great and so violent that he seemed suddenly to become another man. From his old courteous, charming, gentlemanly self he was changed into an unscrupulous, scheming ruffian.

He had wanted something very much, and in times past he had moved heaven and earth to gain this desire; now he would move hell itself. Nay, more, he would become hell's chief mover in the diabolic plans which dashed with lightning rapidity through his brain.

He returned to Nacogdoches and presented himself at the little inn.

Mr. Bailey was sitting in the sun at the entrance of the "run," indulging in his usual pastime of whittling.

"What are you nosing round here for?" the innkeeper gruffly demanded.

Paul resented the tone, the question, and the manner in which it was put; but, in a moment, realized that it was all probably due to the innkeeper's bad manners. He answered that he was looking for Mrs. Pope.

"Well, you won't find her here," and Mr. Bailey returned to his whittling.

Paul asked apprehensively where she was.

Mr. Bailey rose and started to walk away.

"They've left," he announced.

"Gone?" Paul cried.

"With her husband," came the laconic addition.

"Where?" Paul was shorter in his

speech, but much more quiet than the innkeeper.

"It's none of your business," Mr. Bailey responded; and as De Cardac took an angry step toward him he added: "Keep cool, young man. Don't get excited. You might make yourself sick."

Paul was close beside him and glaring angrily at him, as if about to strike the old man. But Mr. Bailey quickly spoke, and his words were of such a character as completely to divert Paul's intention.

"From the looks of you, young fellow," he began, "I should say you was in for a bad spell o' fever. You're yaller as er gourd." Then pointedly he added: "As *yaller* as the company you keeps!"

De Cardac started. Before he could speak the innkeeper went on:

"I will just tell you this—I know somethin' of your companions. I have seen you more than once with a mulatto that I think is Neil Carrington's murderer. I'm not sure, and I ain't never been able to catch you; but I've got my eyes out for that Jude, and I'll just keep my peepers on you, too."

Paul de Cardac flushed. He dared not retort. He did not know just how much the old man knew, and he thought it best to let the matter drop. He was therefore about to walk away when, changing his mind, he advanced and, looking the innkeeper squarely in the eyes, demanded:

"Have the Popes left Nacogdoches?"

"Well," Mr. Bailey began, "if I said as how they had, what would it matter to you?"

"I must know!" Paul cried.

"Very well, then, they have gone, yistiddy."

"Where did they go?"

"I'm not tellin', unless I know *why* you're askin'."

"I must see Mrs. Pope," Paul announced.

"Well, you'll not find her from anything I'll tell you," the innkeeper growled. "I'll not have you pesterin' that young woman. I like her! And that's more than I will say for her husband. He's too dog-goned opinionated like."

"You mean that you will not tell me

where they have gone?" De Cardac demanded.

"That's about it," Mr. Bailey coolly responded.

"I'll find out!" Paul announced violently.

"Well, not from me. And I don't think nobody else knows," Mr. Bailey snapped.

Paul turned on his heel and walked back to his own home. His head was throbbing so that he could scarcely think, but he was wishing intensely that he knew where he could find Jude. But since the negro, probably desperately wounded, had disappeared, he had been able to find no trace of him.

Feverishly he mumbled to himself:

"Jude would go with me. I must go. I must go and get her. I must."

Restless, uncertain, and full of longing, he wandered about his little two-room cabin, forming a hundred wild, impossible schemes and almost immediately abandoning them all.

It was late afternoon and time to eat, but instead of making any preparations for his evening meal, he left the house. He went out to make inquiries as to where the Popes had gone.

No one seemed to know anything about them; but at last he found a negro girl who told him that a covered wagon containing a man and a woman had driven by at noon the previous day. They had taken the old San Antonio Road, and she believed they were bound for Baxter.

Without a thought of food or anything else, Paul hurriedly saddled his horse and took the old Spanish trail. This road, usually much frequented, proved very lonely at night, for he rode all through the hours of darkness without passing any one.

Urged on by his impatient desires, he continued his journey without eating, until late afternoon; then he was forced from sheer exhaustion to dismount, lest he pitch from his horse.

He was hot with fever, faint from lack of nourishment, and miserable from disappointment. He had worked himself into such a state that, had he encountered Fred, without a moment's hesitation he would have fired upon him.

Paul de Cardac lay upon the ground near his horse, wondering why the sun should be jumping about so. His tongue was parched and, although he had drunk more than half of his flask of whisky, and all of the stale water contained in the skin which he had found tied to his saddle, his thirst remained unabated.

He attempted to get up, but sank back, aching in every joint.

"I think I'm going to be sick," he muttered, and wondered what he should do.

Then his head began to spin as though it were entirely separate from his body. It seemed as if it were whirling in a giddy manner about his feet. He groaned and, seeking for his whisky-flask, put it to his lips and was about to drink.

A movement of his horse caused him to turn his head. In his half-delirious condition the horse appeared to be a fabulous creature with wings and a hot, fiery breath. This monster drew nearer and nearer to him, and he felt as though it was already devouring him. The flask fell from his burning hands, and with a cry he sank back unconscious.

He lay in this condition, moaning and talking by turns, all that night, and early the next morning was discovered by a party of Comanche Indians, who were returning from a successful attack upon the covered wagon which had been bound for Baxter. The savages advanced in a wild humor; they were overjoyed with their recent plunder, and the addition of two scalps, now worn at the belt of their old chief, Broken-Big-Toe, rendered them ferociously proud.

At the head of the Comanches rode Hailstones, and she was about to allow her braves to despatch this new victim when Jude dashed forward and interceded. He had recognized De Cardac, and whereas he bore the creole no good-will, he realized that Paul might be of infinite service to him in his future attempts upon Frederick Pope.

After some altercation Jude was permitted to put De Cardac's limp body across the saddle of the sick man's own horse, and to proceed with the unconscious sufferer to the place where the Comanches were temporarily camped.

Now began a long period of desperate

illness for Paul de Cardac, who hung between life and death for many days, always watched over and cared for by the mulatto. Several times the restless Comanches moved their camp, but Jude remained in a small shelter which he had built and where Paul lay tossing about in agony.

Sometimes Jude would surprise himself with the tenderness and care which he bestowed upon the fever-stricken patient. Time passed; the disease reached its crisis. Jude was ceaseless in his attention; the crisis passed; Paul still lived.

They depended largely upon the Comanches, of whose band Jude was considered a member, to keep them supplied with necessities. The provisions given them were, of course, the worst things possible for the sick man, but he had an iron constitution, and slowly, in spite of everything, began to mend.

Weeks had gone by, they had found a more protecting shelter, and there winter came upon them. De Cardac continued slowly to improve, but he was still far from well.

The Comanches were off on one of their frequent raids, and had not been near them for ten days. Jude sat talking with De Cardac, who, although too weak to do much for himself, was beginning to plan.

"We'll have to be doing something mighty soon," the mulatto declared.

"You mean food supply is low?"

"Yes," Jude responded.

The sick man made a wry face.

"You might kill me," Paul began, "though I suppose I'd make bad eating."

At first Jude made no reply to this pleasantry, then he said:

"When you git strong you will go with me for him?"

This was the first time that their common enemy had ever been spoken of, and in reply the white man extended his thin, shaky hand.

Instantly it was grasped by the mulatto. The two understood each other.

Jude spoke first.

"You want *her*," he slowly announced.

"And *his* life," Paul added.

"His life?" the mulatto echoed questioningly.

"Yes. I hate him!" Paul cried fiercely. Jude was astonished, but he was also delighted. Now these two could work in perfect harmony. It was rather remarkable how they supplemented each other. Paul gave to the ex-slave just that initiative, that backbone, which his years of servility had robbed him of; and the mulatto, by his recklessness and cold-bloodedness, which was largely born of ignorance, confirmed Paul in the cruelty and vindictiveness which were such recent additions to his nature.

One night, in the early spring-time, they had a call from Hailstones. She was alone and brought them some food. She was never a talkative person, and now she seemed more than usually taciturn. They could not learn just what had brought her to them, nor why she had chosen the night for her visit. But they did learn, to their surprise, that she had temporarily separated herself from the band and had not been with the Comanches for several days, although she knew where they were lying in wait.

In the course of her talk she told the two men that she had seen the "white squaw and her man." She had heard about Frederick and Mary Ann from Jude in the early days when, desperately wounded, the mulatto had returned to the Indians and thrown in his lot with them.

De Cardac started up.

"Where are they?" he cried.

She told him that they were three days' journey away, and that they lived in a cabin of their own, not far from the ruins of the little mission where she had received her education.

"When can we go?" Paul asked excitedly. He raised himself on his elbow and looked about with bright eyes.

"There's no chance of our going until you're well," Jude said. "And goodness knows when that will be."

Paul turned suddenly to the Indian girl. "How did you come to be prowling about where they live?"

Hailstones made no immediate reply. She seemed lost in her own thoughts. How could she tell these men her inmost secrets? How could she ever explain to them that,

since Leonidas Carrington had gone away from her, she had been miserable and lonesome?

She had tried to forget him. Then she had hoped and prayed that he would disregard all she had told him and come and take her for his own. Even to herself she saw something pathetic in the way in which she had gone wandering over the prairies seeking to find again her lost peace of mind. She had gone again to the scenes where she had been taught what she first knew of the whites. She knew that the little mission was only a ruin, but still she had gone and wandered about the old familiar haunts.

By accident she had seen Mary Ann and had followed her, hoping against hope that she would catch sight of the man she loved. But she had not, for the simple reason that Leonidas was out, elsewhere, seeking high and low for her.

Finally Hailstones spoke:

"Sometimes," she began, "I go where white man lives. I am looking—always looking for some one." And she added sadly, as if speaking to herself: "But I never find some one."

De Cardac was puzzled, and felt inclined to question her and learn further about this some one for whom she was seeking, but his own affairs were of too much importance.

"Will you take us where the white man and his squaw are living?" he asked.

"Too sick—you," she objected.

"No," he cried, "I think I'm well enough. I know I am. It's nice weather now. Spring is here. Yes, I can go!"

He was full of fire and extraordinarily fresh and animated in appearance.

Jude attempted to argue with him. He only succeeded in persuading De Cardac to remain where he was, provided that Jude himself went at once with the Indian and learned just how the land lay.

"I will go," Jude agreed, "and come back as quickly as I can. You keep care of yourself, and maybe when I come you can go away with me, and then—"

He raised his eyes in an expressive way, and did not finish his sentence.

Early the next day Jude departed, with

Hailstones, leaving the invalid with enough food to last him about a week.

Five days De Cardac was left alone, and, strange to relate, he fared much better during this time than in his wildest hopes he had anticipated. Perhaps he had depended too long upon the careful ministrations of the mulatto, and it only required the necessity of an effort on his part to pull him into shape. Or it may have been the stimulation of the prospect of at last accomplishing his long-deferred desire.

When Jude returned he was astonished to find the young man not only, as he expressed it, "up and doing," but in a fit condition to travel, and looking remarkably like his old handsome self. Hailstones was not with the mulatto, but had gone back, she said, to join her band.

"There's something funny about that Indian," Jude declared. "She's sort of lost like."

"Lost?" Paul queried.

"Yes—lonesome like," Jude explained.

"I'm sure I don't care," De Cardac remarked.

Jude looked at his companion in surprise. Sometimes he found it hard to believe that this hard, cruel, selfish man was the kind, love-sick gentleman he had first known. Paul had changed so much that even Jude was a little afraid of him.

Without any regrets they broke camp and departed, and the heart of each man thrilled; at last they were moving upon their prey!

This time they were determined to proceed with such caution and thought as to insure the success which heretofore had always eluded them. It was Jude's suggestion that they take up their abode in the ruins of the old mission.

"There's a little shelter there," the mulatto explained, "and we won't be far from the house. Doc has two niggers at work with him, and, besides, his wife has a nigger woman. We can't fight 'em all. I dunno what we'll do, but when we are near some-thin' is sho to turn up."

The night of their arrival, under cover of the darkness, Jude went to Fred's home on a stealthy tour of investigation. He returned with the disconcerting news that the

house was absolutely deserted; neither whites nor blacks were about.

Where had they gone? What had occurred? What should they do now? Such thoughts thronged the heads of the conspirators.

It just happened that it was this same night that Mary Ann spent beside the body of Steve Rogers. Indeed, just after dawn the next morning, De Cardac and his partner were almost caught by Fred and his party who were scouring the country for the Indians who had compassed Steve's murder.

De Cardac was awakened by Jude whispering fiercely:

"Quick, get up! Doc Pope and a big crowd are on us."

"Where?"

"There," the mulatto pointed, "de bushes and dat strip of wall hide 'em. They are headed dis way."

Immediately De Cardac was alert. He snatched at his gun and was about to spring to his feet.

Jude caught at him with a frantic clutch.

"Keep down!" the mulatto cried. "They might see you. We must hide. Take everything with you. Don't leave any traces."

"Where shall we hide?"

"In dat old well we found yistiddy. They'll never hunt us dere," Jude began with assurance, but ended weakly: "Anyhow, it's de only place."

"But our horses?" De Cardac cried as he was creeping after the mulatto.

"They are hitched 'way over dere, so deep in de brush they'll never find 'em. Anyway, dey can't be huntin' us."

"Who are they after?" Paul wondered aloud.

Jude did not respond, but stole noiselessly forward, almost bent double. Paul followed close after. They could not yet see the approaching party of horsemen, but they could hear them talking.

"Hurry," Jude whispered impatiently.

They had reached the old well and hastily but cautiously climbed over the side and began the descent. The walls were formed of rough stones which had once been held in place by plaster. Now the

plastering had fallen out, and they easily climbed down and remained crouching in almost a foot of mud which covered the bottom.

So far they were safe, but they were still in grave danger. They heard the men dismount and go stamping about among the ruins, hurriedly searching for some one.

Their voices frequently drifted down into the depths of the well, and once some one came and looked down; but as both of the crouching figures were darkly clothed and Jude had heard the man approaching in time to warn De Cardac to hide his face and hands, the seeker turned away.

"Do you suppose they are after us?" Paul whispered.

For reply, Jude put his grimy hand across the white man's mouth.

A long time elapsed in silence. The hidden men could no longer hear voices, and imagined that the searching-party had passed on, but they dared not venture forth. For now they were in terror lest their horses be discovered and thus the suspicion of the seekers be aroused to such an extent that they would probably hang about the ruins all day.

Finally Jude considered it safe to go up and look around. He began the climb, but found it considerably more difficult than the descent. But he finally accomplished it, and was gone some time. De Cardac was alarmed and could not imagine what had happened, but at last Jude's face appeared, and the mulatto called down that all was safe.

Paul climbed out, and saw that there was no trace of the horsemen.

"Where have they gone?" he whispered, looking about over the expanse of prairie.

"Dey are concealed from us by that thicket where the horses are hid," Jude responded. "I done looked. Dat's what took me so long."

"Now they are sure to get the horses," Paul moaned. "We better go back into the well."

"Dey is long past where the hosses is," Jude contemptuously explained.

So the horsemen had passed them by. Their search had certainly not been very thorough, but perhaps they had been too

anxious to press on and had regarded the old ruined mission as a most improbable place to discover that for which they sought.

"Well, we learned one good thing," De Cardac announced. "Fred Pope's cabin is without his protection. Let's go there at once and see what we can find."

"First," Jude began, "dare's something mighty strange here. Let's see about it."

It seems that while in the well he had noticed the cavity where a large stone of the wall had long since fallen out. And he had heard the footsteps of the horsemen very distinctly through this opening. He declared that he believed the side of the well would prove to be the wall to a cellar.

They grubbed about in the ruins and sure enough before long discovered a huge trap-door, hidden beneath almost half a foot of débris.

The door was made of big, heavy timbers and in a fine state of preservation. It was held in place by a monstrous bolt, which had so corroded that, try as they would, the two men could not budge it.

"No use," Jude declared. "Ten men couldn't prize that open. Let's go down the well."

They did so, and Jude, with little difficulty, succeeded in effecting an opening large enough for them easily to slip through. He then lighted a torch that he had brought down with him and crept through the hole. De Cardac was about to follow him when Jude cried that it was no use.

"Nothing here," the mulatto declared; "just a cellar and big steps up to that trap-door."

"Well, I'm going to see," Paul declared, dropping through the hole and dislodging another large stone, which fell with a thud the distance of about four feet to the bottom of the well.

They found themselves in an underground room of about twenty feet by twelve. At one was an old stairs that led to the trap-door which had probably once opened into the kitchen or pantry of the mission. The room had an earthen floor, which was not very hard and the earth of the roof was supported by heavy boards resting on rough posts. The place was chill, but the air was not very bad.

"I guess it used to be the store-room," the young creole announced, "and it was built close to the well for the sake of coolness."

"Maybe," Jude admitted, "let's go."

Again they climbed through the opening and, monkey-fashion, ascended to the sunlight. Once there De Cardas was for going at once to Fred's home.

"But I tell you," Jude expostulated, "she ain't there."

"Maybe she has returned," De Cardas rejoined. "She was not with those men."

They went to where Jude had hitched the horses and, mounting, started toward the little house where lived Fred and Mary Ann. They advanced cautiously, availing themselves of the high grass. And when they had arrived within about a mile of the place, they left their horses and crept forward on foot.

The two men seemed perfectly cool and made trite remarks to each other, but within they were so full of excitement that they could, with difficulty, control themselves.

When they drew near the house they heard voices. Women were speaking within. One of these women was Mary Ann.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ABDUCTION.

ON foot, Mary Ann and Polly prepared to depart from the Rogers house. They spread a sheet over the body of the murdered man and crept away, hating to leave the door unlocked and yet having no means of fastening it. It was early in the morning and the sun shone beneficially upon the prairies, now beginning to show faintly green, for spring was well under way.

They were unarmed, and apprehensively they traversed the mile and a half of open country; but nothing occurred to alarm them. And when they reached Mary Ann's home they were not surprised to find the house deserted.

Fred had gone, and so had the two negroes, but this time young Pope had thought sufficiently of his wife to leave a note. She found this stuck in a crack between the

steps of the rude staircase. Hurriedly she opened it and read:

Steve Rogers has been killed by the Indians. I am going with Ed and the Carringtons in pursuit of the murderer. The moment you get this go at once to the Carringtons' house, and stay there until I come back; and for God's sake be careful.

Yours, F. P.

So Fred had departed again, on some one else's business, if not absolutely forgetting his wife, at least making no effort to assure himself that she was safe and out of danger. Of course he had no way of knowing where she was or under what circumstances she was going to spend the night; but she felt that he should have made an effort to find out. She was annoyed, and determined not to go to the Carringtons, if for no other reason than to irritate her husband.

She had scarcely made this resolve when Thetis, Melissa, and the Misses Lord arrived on the scene. Mary Ann, not knowing who her visitors were, looked them over through a loophole high up in the wall. The four women were armed, almost to the teeth. It did not seem humorous to see guns swung around the shoulders of the mother and daughter, but the sight of the Misses Lord, each brandishing a large pistol with which she menaced the life of herself and all in the neighborhood, was almost too much for Mary Ann.

She hastily unbarred the door and allowed her visitors to enter.

"Steve Rogers has been killed and scalped," the Misses Lord announced in chorus, their teeth chattering with fear.

"And we have been terrified about you," Thetis added. "Last night Fred and Ed Rogers came by our house and took with them all of our men. They are scouring the country now for the Indians."

Melissa interrupted her mother to remark: "We were told you were coming to us. Your husband said so."

Mary Ann looked at her and smiled. "Well, I didn't come," she said.

"So I see," Melissa retorted. "You don't mind your husband so well, now that you are getting used to him."

Mary Ann ignored this remark and,

turning to Thetis, told how she had found Steve's body at the edge of the pool and how she and Polly had dragged it back to the cabin, at the door of which they had been fired upon by an unseen Indian. She quickly rehearsed the details of the terrible night which she had passed. Polly, who had again barred the door after the entrance of the visitors, stood listening with wide eyes, as though hearing the story for the first time. Once she interrupted to tell about the Indian boy that she had seen prowling in the neighborhood of the Rogers house.

"It wuz de same one what fotched de soap fur his po' pa to eat."

"Do you suppose," Melissa inquired, "that boy had anything to do with Steve's death?"

"Who knows?" Mary Ann cried, and added: "But what difference does that make? Are we all going to stay here?"

"Good Heavens, no!" cried the Misses Lord, as usual speaking in chorus.

"Why not?" Mary Ann wanted to know. "We are as well protected here as anywhere, and if the Indians are out, to take the five-mile ride across country to your house seems to me a foolish and needless tempting of Providence."

But Thetis would not hear of remaining. She had promised the colonel that she would abide in her own home and defend it against all comers, and so she intended to do.

"I only came to see what was the matter with you, child. We were frightened and looked for you all last night," she explained.

Mary Ann saw no reason for arguing, and collecting arms and ammunition, she and Polly went out to saddle their horses, intending to accompany the Carringtons.

They discovered their animals were gone, whether stolen or taken by Fred's party, they did not know. They were therefore obliged to return and beg to be permitted to ride double with Melissa and the lighter of the Misses Lord. Their request was granted and the cavalcade was soon under way.

Their progress had certain elements of humor, but no one was in the mood to appreciate the fact. They were nervous and always on the lookout for skulking Indians.

Twice they were alarmed by noises in the high grass, but either these noises came from frightened animals or, if made by savages, the savages did not attack them.

As they emerged from the house they did not see two men crouching in the bushes. One man was white and the other mulatto. They were De Cardac and Jude. They did not deem it expedient to attack the party of six armed women; for, as De Cardac afterward remarked, he was not so afraid of the ones that knew how to use their guns as he was of those two old women who kept waving their pistols around.

"They'd never hit anything they aimed at, but they'd be sure to kill one or the other of us by accident," he averred.

Jude had wanted to fire upon the women and it had only been with considerable difficulty that De Cardac held him back.

"We must wait," he whispered. "This is not the time."

As the women passed near the Rogers house, they wanted to go in, but the Misses Lord were too terrified to do so; and, rather than divide their forces, they hurried on to the Carrington place.

Here, Mary Ann was surprised to find one negro man. "I thought all the men had gone with Fred?" she exclaimed.

"All but this one," Melissa explained.

"Who did you suppose I'd leave the twins with?" Thetis flared indignantly. "Did you think I would have left them here entirely alone with only a few nigger women?"

Mary Ann did not reply to this anti-feminist remark, but began assisting her friends in the many duties that were required to fit the house for what they believed might be an immediate Indian attack. But the Indians did not come. Four days passed and there was no sign of an attack, but also no sign of the return of Fred and his posse.

The only difficulty that the little garrison encountered was that of procuring water. This was always fetched from a branch which formed a pool off at one side of the house. They took turns going out after it, two at a time. One of the negresses would bear the pails and one of the white women would accompany her as a guard.

Late one afternoon Polly caused a terrible commotion by returning with the announcement that she had seen the Indian boy of the soap episode, peeping at her from behind a big tree, whose branches extended out over the pool. One of the Misses Lord had been Polly's guard and at the first yell which Polly had emitted, the guard had turned and incontinently fled back to the house, leaving the terrified negress to her fate. But Polly got hold of herself and made such strenuous efforts to reach safety that she actually arrived before Miss Lord.

Although the Indian had done nothing whatever except peep at them, no one in the place slept that night, and twice Thetis was sure that she heard footsteps. They were all in a bad state by morning, and were really in no condition to protect themselves had any danger presented itself. But no danger did present itself, although they felt it hovering near them.

They wondered what had become of the men, what was keeping them so long, why they had heard nothing from them. No more trips had been made to the branch for water, and before night their supply was entirely exhausted. Finally Polly, whose mercurial temperament had so completely recovered from her fright that she seemed no longer cognizant of the danger lurking about the spring, offered to go and fetch water, but only on condition that she had the negro man as a guard.

"I think it's silly for anybody to go," Mrs. Carrington declared. But they had had less than one pail of water for the whole party for a day and a night, and the twins were clamorous for a drink.

"We can't go through the night without water," Mary Ann commented, "and I don't see any use in waiting for the men to come back. They mayn't return to-night at all. I think Polly had better go now."

It was about eight o'clock and quite dark when Polly, accompanied by the negro and Miss Lord, who carried a pine torch, left the house.

"I think it's very silly to let that old woman go with them," Melissa remarked.

"She's not so old," snapped Miss Lord, who had been left behind. "She's almost my twin and I'm sure I'm not old."

Melissa smiled and made no reply. Indeed, she had no opportunity, because at that instant they were startled by blood-curdling shrieks and in these shrieks they could make out a man's voice as well as the staccato yells of Miss Lord.

"By Heavens! What can have happened?" cried Mary Ann, looking to see that the door was securely barred.

"They are probably being scalped," announced one of the twins in a comforting way.

At that moment an avalanche was hurled against the door and, in terror, the women were about to fire from their various loopholes when, from out of the darkness came the frantic cries of Miss Lord.

"Open the door! Let us in!"

The door was unbarred and the negro man, whose terrified eyes seemed to stretch over most of his face, dashed into the room. At his heels came Polly and Miss Lord. Polly was minus her two buckets and Miss Lord had lost her torch and her hair was streaming out behind her.

"It is a panther—a panther," the poor woman shrieked. "At the spring—in the tree—Polly was getting down on her knees and I looked up and saw his big eyes."

"A little mo' and I'd 'a' been snatched to Gawd A'mighty!" Polly supplemented.

More than one person cried: "A panther!"

"Yes," Miss Lord began, when Mary Ann interrupted by announcing, "I'm going to see."

An astounded silence greeted her remark, but before she could reach the door everyone was remonstrating.

"Are you sure it was a panther?" Mary Ann demanded.

"Sho as I'm alive," Polly cried. "I saw him good. I saw his eyes shinin' up out of de branch and I thought they was stars, till I heard Miss Lord fotch a yell, and then I looked up an' saw him, all yeller in the tree."

"I am going," Mary Ann cried, and before any one could stop her she unbarred the door and, rifle in hand, started across the threshold.

"Wait! Take a light! Go with her, somebody!" Miss Lord implored.

"What's she going for?" George pertinently demanded.

"To satisfy her fool curiosity," Melissa snapped. "That's the only reason I can see."

"She shall not go *alone*," Thetis cried as she also disappeared through the door into the darkness.

This was the signal for a general exodus from the house. Every one rushed forth as if determined to capture Mary Ann. The negro man, a pine torch in each hand, soon joined them.

"Where's she gone?" Mrs. Carrington demanded. She was about fifty yards from the house, on the way toward the branch, and there was no sign of Mary Ann.

"She's right thar! See her dress!" Polly pointed and called out, but no reply came, and no one was able to see anything in the direction indicated by the negress.

"I guess the panther's got her," George confided to Georgiana.

"Do they eat little boys and little girls, too?" Georgiana wanted to know.

George's reply was cut short by a note of terror in his mother's voice.

"Something horrible has happened," Mrs. Carrington declared. "That girl has disappeared. There's her gun on the ground —right there by you, Melissa."

Melissa gingerly picked up the gun. It was Mrs. Pope's. Several voices called to Mary Ann, but there was still no response. If she had only gone to the branch she could easily have heard them. It was not more than three hundred yards from the house.

In amazement the little crowd stood wondering what had happened.

Thetis soon recovered sufficiently to take charge of the situation. She ordered them all back into the house and, taking the negro man and Polly with her, started bravely toward the branch. In a few moments they arrived near the water.

There was no sign of Mary Ann. Thetis called, again with no success. It was as though the earth had opened up and swallowed the girl. And then Mrs. Carrington thought she heard horses. The sound was so muffled that she could not be sure, but she called again and again. No answer.

In the excitement caused by this un-

looked for disaster, the panther had been forgotten until a scream from Polly was accompanied by her announcement that she could see his eyes again. Thetis went forward a few steps.

Shading her face from the glare of the torch, she distinctly saw the outlines of some beast crouching in the tree across the branch. She could shoot, but she was not an accurate marksman. Nevertheless, she leveled her rifle and fired, and Polly followed her example. Whether it was Polly's shot or Mrs. Carrington's that took effect they did not know, but a commotion occurred in the branches and then the creature moved so that it came more clearly into view. They had wounded it; and it was, as the negress had declared, a panther!

"He's comin' down on us," the negro man cried in terror.

"Not until after he gets across the branch," Mrs. Carrington disdainfully announced. She had loaded again and was ready to fire. This time she took accurate aim and the shot did the work. The panther, mortally wounded, attempted to reach the ground, but, half-way down, fell and crashed into the bushes at the far side of the pool.

"I think he's done for," Thetis announced, "but I wish I knew where that girl has gone." She called again and again, but finally gave up and started back to the house, hoping against hope that when she arrived Mary Ann would be there.

She found the little garrison in a state of panic. Not only had Mary Ann not returned, but Mrs. Carrington's shots had scared them almost to death. In imagination they had seen her and her companions murdered in a dozen different ways.

The Misses Lord had taken refuge in their usual manner and it was not until the customary administration of brandy that their hysterical cries and laughter were quieted. General consternation possessed the party because of Mary Ann's mysterious disappearance. Try as they would, they could find no explanation, until one of the twins commenting upon the fact, suggested that whoever it was that put the ladder up to Mary Ann's window at the inn was probably the one who had got her now.

Thetis then believed that she saw a solution to the enigma.

"If it's not the Indians," she muttered, "it's that mulatto, and if it's not the mulatto, it's that nasty, stinkin' little foreigner. May the Lord help her! I wish Charles or some one were here to tell me what to do."

In this disorganized state the garrison at the Carrington house remained, until about twelve o'clock that night when Fred and his party returned.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PRISONER.

After allowing Mary Ann and her four companions to pass in safety, De Cardac and Jude held a long consultation. The result of which was to bind the two schemers more closely together. Paul had promised that, no matter what happened, he would stand by Jude until Frederick Pope was killed. The creole had vainly endeavored to discover why Jude bore such enmity toward Fred. The ex-slave would not reveal his secret; but he solemnly promised De Cardac that, come what might, he would not desert him until Mary Ann was his.

The conspirators had overheard most of the discussion at Fred's cabin and they knew where the party of armed women had gone. They followed them and secreted themselves in the neighborhood of the Carrington house.

For four days they spied upon the place, during which time it just happened that Mary Ann never left the house. Paul and the mulatto took turns at watching. They dared not make an open attack, but bided their opportunity.

De Cardac was like one possessed; hectic in his intentions to achieve the fiendish purpose upon which he had staked everything, and toward which Jude, with the cunning of the devil himself, was constantly inciting him.

The mulatto hated, and the white man loved; these two opposite passions burned in them at white heat and produced the same result: the desire to compass the de-

struction of the life and happiness of Frederick Pope and the undoing of his wife. Nothing was too low, nothing too mean for them to stoop to in order that they might gratify their evil lusts.

On the night of the panther scare, when Mary Ann emerged from the house, De Cardac had been hiding very near the door. As the woman rushed out into the darkness, she was clearly revealed in the bright light which streamed through the open door.

Paul realized his advantage; Mary Ann had only taken a few steps when he crept after her; skirting the path of light, he stole through the darkness. Divesting himself of his coat, he sprang upon the unsuspecting girl and threw the coat over her head.

At first she was so astonished that she made no cry, nor did she struggle to free herself. Her gun slipped from her relaxed fingers and dropped silently upon the grass. De Cardac pinioned her arms tightly to her sides, and, lifting her off her feet, ran with his burden toward where the horses were hidden.

Paul was far from having recovered his usual strength, but Mary Ann was light, and besides, now that he was achieving victory, he seemed possessed of an almost superhuman power.

The woman, taken so completely by surprise, could make little resistance. The arms that held her seemed made of iron and were so hot that they seemed to burn through her clothes. She was dazed more than she was frightened. She attempted to cry out, but no sound escaped through the heavy coat.

In a few minutes Paul had joined Jude. Then Mary Ann was bound; her arms strapped to her sides, her feet tied together. The coat was not taken from her head and Paul continued to hold it tightly in place while he whispered directions to the mulatto. Mary Ann could scarcely breathe and gasped pitifully for air, trembling and twisting as she was changed from the hands of one of the captors to those of the other.

Then, like a sack of meal, she was lifted onto a horse and placed in the arms of Paul de Cardac.

All this had taken place before Thetis

Carrington had started to the branch. Mary Ann faintly heard the calls of her friends, but she could make no reply.

She had not heard Paul's whispers to Jude because the cautious creole had spoken so softly; and she did not know who held her. But through instinct she divined the identity of the man in whose throbbing arms she lay; and, it was characteristic of her that anger surged much more strongly in her than did fear.

The horses were first walked very cautiously. Their hoofs had been muffled; but, in spite of everything, a certain amount of noise was made. Had it not been that, at just this time, Thetis Carrington was completely absorbed in her efforts to kill the panther, she would probably have heard the fugitives.

For the moment De Cardac believed that her shots were directed against themselves. He urged his horse into a gallop, and Jude did likewise, although the mulatto remarked that the commotion was from the far side of the house and over in the direction of the branch.

Then De Cardac recalled the panther and the fright of the negroes. He had been near enough to the house to overhear all the conversation which had taken place when the terrified water-carriers returned.

He explained the affair to Jude and then suggested that he thought it safe to pause for a moment and properly gag the prisoner.

"She's breathing so hard that I'm afraid something awful will happen if I keep this coat over her head much longer," he announced.

"I've got a gag made," Jude replied, "but be mighty careful. She'll holler if she gets a chance."

"I think we are far enough away," Paul persisted. He was afraid that Mary Ann was already suffocated.

He took the coat from her head. She had suffered considerably, the first intake of breath hurt her and she struggled away from the man in whose arms she lay. One cry she gave: "Paul!" Then her eyes caught sight of Jude and she was struck dumb.

The mulatto took advantage of this moment to insert the gag between her teeth.

She, at first, made no effort to resist and, when she came to herself sufficiently to struggle, it was too late.

Her eyes stared at the murderer and she trembled; for now she realized the enormity of her danger. The mulatto glared maliciously back, then without a word he remounted and the cavalcade resumed its flight through the night.

The chill air blew about them. A wind was sweeping over the prairies and the grass bent and flowed beneath it like black sheets of water. A strange expectancy hung over the fields as though a storm were brewing.

The man against whose breast she rested held her more tightly as they galloped forward. She felt his body's heat flowing into her. It was offensive to her, but she could not draw away. From time to time, she would look at him in an attempt to make her eyes speak her aversion; but, whenever she did so, De Cardac would lean down and kiss her defenseless cheek or throat or hair.

Angrily, she attempted to protect herself, but it was all vain. She was too firmly bound. The ride continued. Neither of the men spoke. Jude was slightly in advance, and did not look back.

De Cardac was fast being roused to a frenzy of passion. He was like a drunken man and the captive woman was terrified by the prospect of the awful fate which she felt steadily advancing toward her.

Once Jude looked at them; and, with a meaning leer, suggested that it was now quite safe to take "the stopper" from her mouth. Paul was on the verge of doing this, but he was afraid.

"Her cries might be heard," he remarked, ruefully gazing upon the lips which the gag protected from his amorous assaults.

For a long while they rode. The night had now become sinister in its hushed silence. The wind had ceased, but a storm was gathering.

Could it be possible, thought Mary Ann, that this was really herself? Was she really here, riding across these prairies? And how had De Cardac and Jude come together? What was their object? Whither were they taking her? Would Fred ever find her; and if he did, would it be too late?

Where was he now? And how had De Cardac come to be lurking in wait for her beside the Carringtons' door? Could something have happened to Fred? Had these villains already made away with him, before attempting to capture her?

Suddenly her wretched questioning thoughts were broken. Jude drew rein; and De Cardac, who was intent upon fondling his prey, did not notice in time and dashed into the other horse.

The mulatto caught angrily at the white man's bridle. "Take care!" he warned.

De Cardac had been almost unhorsed; and Mary Ann nearly slipped from his arms. Her knees were crushed against the flank of Jude's mount. She was not seriously hurt, but she had been forced dumbly to endure considerable pain.

Paul, realizing this, for, although she could make no complaint, her eyes told of her suffering. He began to pat and stroke and coo over her as one does over a child that is hurt.

The mulatto interrupted him and disgustedly announced: "Leave her erlone. Somebody's comin'."

"I don't hear anything," Paul spoke like a man in a dream.

"Hear them now?" Jude persisted. "A lot of 'em."

"Yes," Paul cried, "I do hear them. Who do you suppose it can be?"

Mary Ann heard them also and in her heart sprang the exultant hope that these gallant riders would prove to be her rescuers.

"They are certainly coming this way," Paul declared.

"Yes," Jude agreed. "And they mustn't see her."

"No, of course not. We must hide ourselves from view." Paul looked about desperately.

But where? What should they do? Where should they go?

"If we hide her in the grass," De Cardac suggested, "we can ride past them, and then come back for her—"

"And let 'em see me," the mulatto cried. "No sirree!"

Paul had forgotten that his companion was a hunted man.

"They may not see us at all," he began.

"Takin' no chances," Jude declared.

As he spoke he sprang from his horse; then stood silently listening to the approaching horsemen who could now be heard distinctly. "This way will be safe," he announced after he had calculated the probable course to be taken by the oncoming riders.

"You help me," De Cardac cried in alarm. "Help take her down."

Hurriedly the defenseless woman was transformed from the abhorred arms of Paul de Cardac to the more abhorrent embrace of the mulatto. She was carried a short distance and dropped in the grass, which was brushed back into place again.

While this was being done Mary Ann was wondering what would happen if one of the unknown horsemen should ride over her. Would she be killed, or only mangled? Would the horseman pause and investigate what he stumbled upon or would he think it the body of some dead animal and ride on?

Meanwhile Jude had taken the two horses and led them a considerable distance away, where he hobbled them. When he returned he found Paul hovering over Mary Ann.

"Don't talk any more," the mulatto warned him. "They are in easy hearing distance now."

The two men squatted in the grass and anxiously waited for the horsemen to pass by. The big party, laughing and talking drew nearer. Suddenly Jude clutched at the arm of his companion.

"Do you hear," he whispered. "It's him!"

They recognized the leader of the party. It was Frederick Pope!

Mary Ann had also recognized that voice, yet she could not make a sound, nor lift a finger to indicate her presence!

"I'm goin' to finish him dis time," Jude whispered.

"No," Paul fiercely objected. "Fool! Don't fire!" He clutched at the mulatto who had already unslung his rifle. "We'll all be murdered."

"What do I care if he's already dead?" Jude hissed.

"You must not," Paul pleaded; "that's

not our bargain! I was to help you kill him, and you were to help me get her."

"Well, haven't I done it?" Jude remonstrated.

Almost insane with fear, Paul de Cardac argued with the bloodthirsty mulatto. Was this to be the end of all his hopes and wild desires? Was he to be tricked like this when success was almost his? He pleaded; he threatened; he prayed, to this fiend who crouched beside him, trembling

like some wild animal about to spring upon its victim.

Meanwhile the horsemen were filing by, only a short distance away. Through the grass the whispering men could vaguely see them against the black sky which, from time to time, was threaded by yellow zig-zags of distant lightning.

So far, Jude had not fired, but his gun was still ready and De Cardac expected every moment to hear it explode.

(To be concluded

NEXT WEEK.)

Back to the Moil

IN Edward Lemp's several sectional book-cases there was no volume authored by Honoré de Balzac. This was merely an accident of choice, for Lemp was better versed in literature than the ordinary busy American business man.

However, in the fact that Lemp had never read a line written by the immortal Frenchman who penned the "Comédie Humaine," lay a droll anachronism. Though, because Balzac lived and worked and joyed and sorrowed and died a long time ago, nobody knew this. Least of all did Lemp himself know it.

Yet, in person and in elements of mind, in big, wise, sane outlook upon life, in sense of humor ranging from chuckling subtleties to Gargantuan laughter, Lemp was the living replica of Balzac, whose name he knew rather dimly as that of a writer of tales, and that was all.

This sane, sound, sweet sense of humor was Lemp's chief compensation in living.

In turn, fate had its jest with him in that he did not know of his uncanny resemblance to the master whose works he would have reveled in had he known of them.

Which proves only that fate is a subtler jester than even the Balzacs of this world.

Upon a spring night wherein the chill of winter's aftermath lingered, Edward Lemp, in smoking jacket and slippers, sat at ease in an armchair in his apartment within one of the cloud-aspiring cubes on Washington Heights.

About him were evidences of happiness, prosperity, and as much contentment as hectic metropolitan standards will allow.

First there was an ideal wife, comrade and coworker, who sat next him, knitting. In addition to these graces Eunice Lemp possessed that of brunette beauty that had not withered with the years. Now in middle life she appeared even younger, and her attraction, which was of the tall and

stately order, was accentuated by the few streaks of silver in her black hair. To these Lemp was wont to refer affectionately as time's mining assay of his "lucky strike."

Secondarily was their housing. For a rental of a thousand dollars a year Lemp occupied this apartment on the eighth floor, large windows commanding a wonderful view of New York. They had a living-room, dining-room, two bedrooms, and a smaller maid's room, a kitchen and bath. Adam furniture and parquet floors lent distinctive touches. The breezes whisking about the lofty roof, transformed with rustic seats and trellises into a summer garden, made a most desirable luxury for the various families during the evenings of the heated months.

Lemp laid down the book he had been reading. It was by the Frenchman, Dumas, and had to do with the adventures of "Three Musketeers."

Placidly puffing at his brier pipe, the man who looked like Balzac gazed from the window over the wilderness of lights.

A thick crop of crisp, waving, dark hair, cut short, covered his massive head. The brow was rather high, the nose short and with flaring nostrils, evidencing a predominant sense of humor. The lips, finely cut and inclined to thickness, were shaded by a small, dark mustache, clipped *à la mode*. His neck was short and thick, but firm, his body somewhat bulky. He was of average height.

Of his features, however, the eyes were the most irresistible. They were dark, but such was their magnetism that the beholder never thought of their hue, but only of their expression, determined by their owner's mood of the moment.

Sparkling with humor, capable at once of a caressing kindness, the lances of shrewd raillery, and keenly hungry for new impressions; patient but restlessly eager, brightened now with laughter and again with scorn, mirroring the ranges of philosophy, analysis, pathos, and pure fun, capable even of containing the shadow of tragedy that is the legacy of the humorist, they were the eyes of a man who from a height observes the grooves, the eyes of Balzac.

Lemp's eyes, staring out over the nocturnal glory of Manhattan, now contained a remote expression that told of retrospection. Presently he chuckled softly.

"What is it, Edward?" In the low, sweet, melodious voice of his wife was an undertone of anticipation. Twenty years of companionship with Lemp had bred no spirit of boredom, of which pessimism is the parent. Lemp was that most refreshing of entities, an optimist with a brain, an asset which enabled him to be always different.

He blew a ring of smoke. His eyes twinkled as he glanced across at her. He spoke, his deep voice an ursine growl of gentleness.

"I was thinking of blazed trails and tangents, Eunie. I was remembering how often we had gazed out over these Chinese lanterns, strung in the big joss house, with the feeling that 'this world is not my home.' I was remembering up-State, and twenty—no, eighteen—years ago."

She returned his rather wistful smile. Her own smile was a little melancholy, with no tinge of bitterness. It was not in her nature to retain acids of thought.

"You were thinking of the old dream," she answered gently. "'Castes in Spain' take so many forms in the questing! Ours was that of the farming lands we hoped one day to own."

"Yes," he assented. "Odd, isn't it, how two persons who so love the open spaces must limit them to elevator excursions to the roof of a twenty-story building for three months in the year? And people who have them are yearning for the cañons of the city! I have a theory that old man Fate has been in business so long that he has contracted creeping palsy. That would account for his spilling the beans!"

"Sometimes," she pursued, her mind turning with his own to life currents that had sped, "during those first two years of our married life, in Rochester, with you in the office and I busy in the little flat, that farm would be right in Monroe County, on the bank of the Genesee River. Again it would be in the Middle West, and perhaps the next week in California. Once we discussed—if ever we could get a thousand

dollars ahead, you remember—buying one of those abandoned farms in New England and developing it. Our farm was one of migratory horizons."

"I remember," assented her husband. "Which migration we were obliged to emulate! Just after our talk about the New England farm along came the panic and panned the dream, and incidentally, my job. Long before the cyclone had reached the sighing stage I was down here, engaged in a wild-eyed hunt for work, leaving you with your mother. Then I got that little twenty dollar clerkship, and you came on and bravely fought out the metropolitan game with me, 'shoulder to shoulder—'"

"And now," she smiled, "it's not so bad!"

"Six thousand a year would be pretty good in--Rochester," he agreed philosophically. "And even here, with the war prices getting their sixth wind, we manage to keep abreast of living expenses."

He glanced down quizzically at the volume of Dumas, in his lap. "But I wonder what the 'Three Musketeers' would do to the cabaret hat boys?" he added.

The bell at the entrance door to the apartment rang vigorously. From the kitchen came the brisk steps of the maid. Soon she entered the room with a small yellow envelope.

"Telegram for Mr. Lemp," she announced, and went back to the confines of the kitchen.

He tore open the envelope and read the message. "H-m!" he murmured, as he glanced at the signature, "he hasn't written to me in a year. Probably something's wrong."

He finished reading and looked up. "There is," he announced. "He's lost his job!"

"Who is he?" asked Mrs. Lemp.

"Tom Osgood."

"Oh!"

"You remember him, then? He called a couple of times when we lived in Rochester. A boyhood friend of mine; we've maintained a desultory correspondence. Well, this time he's got a *real* trouble. He always had a lot of imaginary ones."

"He wires he's down and out, that his need is desperate, and he thinks I could help him to connect, after some plan he has formed. He wants to know if we can put him up for a few days while I exert my influence for him. I'd starve before I'd send such a yowl, either over the wire or under a sealed envelope! But Tom is Tom, and always will be."

"How about it, Eunie—shall I wire him to trot along down here? You're the doctor."

Mrs. Lemp's thought had kept pace with his words. Rarely congenial, they had grown to be quite sufficient to themselves, and visitors were rare at the apartment. Also, their scale of living did not admit of much entertaining.

Of recent years they had fallen more deeply into the easy habits of metropolitan life, in a financial sense, and their outlay kept pace with their income. With the rising cost of living, they would now have been at a loss to figure how to correct this, even if they had been disposed to do so.

However, Eunice, whose heart was kindly, had decided without hesitation. "By all means, dear, wire him to come," she urged. "You'd better step down to the telegraph-office and send him a night message. If he's down and out, the poor fellow must be worrying terribly. You will be able to do something for him, doubtless."

Edward Lemp changed his pipe for a cigar, and secured hat, coat and stick.

"Good little girl!" he growled affectionately, though Eunice was as tall as he was. "You're an artist; you contrived to sound as if you *liked* the idea! When two people become settled down, along in the meridian, it's hard to consider being disturbed, isn't it? Selfish, I grant you, but quite a human offense!"

He turned at the door, his sparkling gaze seeking hers.

"When we were kids together, Tom used to be afraid of his shadow," he told her. "That ought not to affect him down here. There are too many lights! He won't have any shadow in little old New York!"

Northward over the courier wires flashed the night message. About ten o'clock the

next morning, while Lemp was busy at his desk down-town, came a second telegram from Osgood:

Syracuse, 9 A.M.
Message received. Thanks, old man, for
old-time's sake. Am on way. Arrive New
York 5 P.M.
Osgood.

Lemp's eyes contracted and his lips pursed in a low whistle as he read the yellow sheet.

"Haunted the telegraph-office at Rochester till my reply got through!" ran his thought. "Must have been up all night, for he caught the earliest train this morning and sent this message *en route*."

"There's enterprise for you! By George, if everybody showed as much enterprise holding a job as in getting another when it is gone, office forces would stay put considerably more than they do!"

He studied the telegram again, his critical, cool, business sense concerned with its phrasing. It was wailly, whiney, almost hysterical in tone. It was the communication of a man whose courage was unequal to "swinging a bluff."

That it required real courage, in the vicissitudes of life, to thus muster one's nerve to at least a seeming of assurance, Lemp well knew from observation—and from experience.

Poor old Tom! Somehow Lemp applied the adjective now as he had done in the far past, when he had been twenty-five and Osgood twenty-three. Tom had always carried upon his shoulders the responsibilities of a heavy if timorous ego. He was apparently still doing it.

He was evidently in frightful luck now; perhaps near his last dollar and approaching the meridian of life which brings either the promise of ultimate success or the encroaching shadows of failure. Lemp must do what he could.

He telephoned his wife that Osgood would arrive at five o'clock and that he would meet him and bring him up for dinner, then turned to the accumulated work upon his desk. As office manager of the Peerless Agricultural Implement Company, with factories up-State and business headquarters in New York, his days were well filled.

Five o'clock found Lemp at the Grand Central Terminal. He had postponed an important late conference to render the courtesy to his old friend.

At six o'clock he sighed with relief as the belated train began to discharge its quota of passengers. From his position near the end of the rope behind which stood folk awaiting friends, he scanned the faces of passing passengers.

He saw Osgood first, though the little man's anxious eyes were boring like gimlets, this way and that, in search of him. Tom had requisitioned the services of no "red cap." He was carrying his own bag.

Lemp stepped around the end of the line. "Hello, Tom, old boy!" he greeted. "How are you? Here, give me your bag! Come on, let's get a taxi. Your train was late."

He strode across the concourse toward Forty-Second Street, the little gray man trotting at his side with swift, nervous steps. Gray he was from head to heel. His fedora was gray, likewise his hair and the flesh of his face, that was webbed and spun with wrinkles of lifelong worry. He wore a business suit of dingy gray and a gray overcoat. There was a sprinkling of gray dust on his shoes, for he had inhabited the smoker all the way from Rochester. Finally, from his thin gray lips poured a torrent of nervous, gray phrases.

"I don't know when I've been so glad to see any one, Ed! Coming along the line just now, looking for you, I didn't see you, and I wondered if anything had happened. For a minute, Ed, I felt as if I didn't have a friend left in the world! I tell you, I was glad to get your message! When a fellow's down and out, it's a thing like that puts heart in him, the feeling that somewhere there's a friend he can rely on!"

"Here we are, Tom!" amiably growled Lemp, hailing a taxi driver and giving him the address. "Climb in! We'll be having some dinner before you know it. You've had a long trip."

"I didn't sleep last night," confessed Osgood, as the vehicle began spinning over the asphalt up-town. "I hung around till I got your message. Then I went home and smoked a while and packed to get the first train. How glad my wife was at the

chance! She told me to tell you how grateful she was at your interest. I was so worked up with everything that I didn't think to wire you I was on the way till I reached Syracuse!"

Lemp's shrewd eyes narrowed as he listened to the disjointed, almost breathless sentences, flung in the queer, cackling, uneven voice he so well remembered.

The man who looked like Balzac was as keenly alive to the bewildering ramifications of the human comedy as had been the master. He had achieved his knowledge in the same intimate way; through battling with obstacles, wrestling and struggling in the mob, tasting both the dregs of defeat and the sweets of victory, reading men not through a glass, darkly, but face to face.

For years in Manhattan, most relentless of the world's marts and its most inspiring, Lemp had experienced his ups and downs and had witnessed those of others. He had shared in and observed scenes of exhilaration and of depression. He had seen men glad beyond reason—and men, with sufficient reason, on the rack of worriment.

But never in his life had he seen a man in the blue funk under which Tom Osgood was laboring.

Of necessity he was silent, since Tom was talking incessantly, giving him some of the details attaching to his perturbed state of mind.

"It came out of a clear sky, Ed, yesterday morning. After fifteen years of honest work, and making good, think of it! Called by the old man into the office, given two weeks' pay, and told that a relative of the manager had to be taken care of, and I was the goat, that my job must be turned over to him! Is there any justice in the world?"

Lemp studied the flare of the haggard eyes in the gray face as the taxi whirled by a street-lamp. There was a deep cleft between the gray brows. Lemp recalled that it had been indelible there before Osgood had reached his early twenties. It had been etched not by concentration but by worry.

Aloft he answered, with dry truth: "Oh, yes, there's justice in the world, but

don't start to hunt for it. You wouldn't have time for anything else!"

"That's just it!" agreed Osgood, with tragic earnestness, absorbing the generality into the whirling orbit of his private affairs. "Time! that's it. I'm up against it, Ed; I've got to have a job!"

"Well," soothed Lemp, "we'll see if we can't get you one. I'll tell you what, Mrs. Lemp has an engagement out this evening, something she contracted a week ago. So after dinner you and I will have the place to ourselves, and we'll whale out your problem. Meanwhile, don't worry; the world owes you a living and you'll keep right on collecting. We're nearly there now, and you must be hungry."

But the exercised spirit of Osgood responded to no gastronomical lure.

"Not so very," he responded, rather absently. "Abbie put me up a lunch and I ate some of it on the train. I gave the rest to a dog that was tied up in the express car ahead. It kept him still for a while; he made me nervous with his incessant howling.

"It's all very well for you to say not to worry, Ed, but how can I help it? Remember that old poem that tells how a fellow feels when he is out of a job? It's different with you, Ed. You're fixed; you haven't ~~anything~~ anything to worry about! Things have gone fine with you."

At the throb of self-pity in Osgood's voice a faint smile wrinkled the corners of his host's mouth. His glance, grown quizzical, veered through the window to the tintinnabulating street they were traversing.

Had Osgood forgotten the crash of eighteen years before, which, while not affecting his position, had sent Lemp, a straw blown by winds of chance, scurrying down into this maelstrom? Did he assume that this town had been conquered, even in modest degree, while Lemp lay upon flowery beds of ease? More than this, did he believe that it did not require the most intense concentration, in this town of fiercest competition, to hold the ground already won?

His gaze returned to Osgood, while he remembered that, with the selfishness of fear, Tom was not considering the problems

of the great world at all, but only those of his little individual one.

"Let me see," he mused, "you were with the Apex Agricultural people, weren't you?"

"Yes," miserably assented Osgood, "I was."

"And were you thinking of locating here?"

Tom straightened in swift dismay and stared across at him. With visible shrinking his look swerved to the outer jam through which the taxicab was threading its way at the moment, to the hordes of people upon the walk scurrying to subway, Elevated stations, and to surface cars.

"What?" he squealed in positive terror. "Tackle New York, when I'm past forty? Do you think I'm crazy, Ed? If I didn't dare to do it when I was young, what chance would I have now?"

Lemp contrived to preserve his gravity. "Well," he admitted regretfully, "the old town is bigger than she was when you and I were young, Tom, and that's a fact. And she'll be still bigger when we're old."

"Old!" despairingly cawed Osgood, "that's the word! And we're old now!"

For the next five minutes he discoursed with gloomy enthusiasm upon the "dead line" which his own fluttering mind had long since created. It seemed that he had fastened upon the exploded Oster theory as business law and gospel; that he figured that after a man had passed the portal of forty years he was permitted, perhaps, to continue cringingly to toil only through fortunate sufferance.

He made it plain that, because of this accident of his years—realized because he had made it his business to grow older with every year instead of wiser—he had come to New York not to demand a right but to beg a favor.

Lemp listened, his droll visage fixed at respectful attention. As he heard the nonsense he realized how far away from Osgood he had grown during these years.

This fact he knew well he owed to New York, the crucible wherein in fire the precious metal of the spirit is separated from the dross. It came to him that never before had he realized the development the town had brought to him till now, when

face to face with this pitiful being who had not dared, but, a prey to his silly fears, had slipped backward with the years.

Because Lemp had grown bigger under the lash of Manhattan, he accepted this sudden realization of values not with any sense of superiority to Osgood, but with humility.

The taxicab stopped. In the midst of his raven croakings, Osgood stopped and looked about bewilderedly.

"Where are we?" he asked, with a nervous start.

"At my home," smiled Lemp reassuringly. "Where's your bag? We'll have dinner, and then we'll have ample time to talk things over."

"I haven't been to New York in fifteen years," chattered Tom, clambering out after him and staring about. "Abbie and I have talked of coming, but we felt we couldn't afford it. Is *that* where you live? Some building!" His glance flashed up the tiers of windows as he walked with Lemp toward the entrance.

"Fair," answered Edward nonchalantly, through knowledge of apartments much more ornate. "Look out!" His ready hand caught Osgood, whose gaze was still upward, from stumbling at the lower step.

"Didn't suppose I'd be coming down on an errand like this," muttered Tom, with a sorry grimace, as they entered the vestibule of the house.

Round this wandered his look, grown awed and respectful, as he noted the colorful appointments and the gilding, the girl at the telephone board, the negro elevator-boy in buttons and blue.

"Gee, Ed! Pretty swell! You've struck it soft!" he whispered as they walked toward the cage. "I wish I could have struck luck!"

They were whirled upward to Lemp's apartment, where Eunice graciously greeted the guest, who was shown to his room to make hasty preparations for dinner, which had been waiting.

Osgood had the grace to refrain from any allusion to his plight while at table, so Mrs. Lemp was spared the ordeal through which her husband had passed. However, he was palpably ill at ease; he ate but little. It

was evident to her that he was consumed by anxiety connected with his errand to their home.

It was with relief, wholly irrepressible, that she left after dinner to fulfil her engagement. Her concern for Edward, who was left to the mercies of this strange being, was tempered by the knowledge that somehow, through the processes of his unique mind that could manufacture sunlight from the deepest shadows, he could extract diversion from the enforced companionship.

"Now, Tom," suggested Lemp, as they took easy chairs in the living-room, smoking two of his choice cigars, "tell me just what you'd like to do. I gather you have some plan, more or less definite. Spill it into my sympathetic ear, old scout."

Osgood, smoking furiously, fidgeted in his chair. His sharp-featured, clean-shaven face snarled into an expression of utter torture. His restless gray eyes, which had been darting restlessly around the room, now fixed upon Lemp's calm, good-humored face.

"When I got that word from the old man yesterday morning, I was knocked silly, Ed," he answered. "Then I heard something, by accident—which I hope proves lucky—that made me think of you. And I figured I'd be standing a better chance to be right on the ground. So I wired you, and hear I am.

"Now, I've been for fifteen years with the Apex people, your principal competitors—though they don't turn out as good a product as the Peerless," he added, with haste that Lemp did not relish. It savored of insincerity born of Osgood's need.

"The Peerless makes the best line of farming implements on earth," pursued Osgood fulsomely; "every one knows that. I've thought for a long time I'd like to be with them—with *you*. But you know a man gets rather used to a place—he hates to change."

He paused, swallowing dryly. The magnetic glance of Lemp was upon him; he found it rather disturbing. He contrived to continue, his nervousness increasing.

"I can sell the goods; my record proves that, Ed. But you can't teach any old dog new tricks. I'm used to that territory; I

don't want to leave it. I'm used to it—like you are to New York."

Lemp smiled inwardly, with the eyes and lips of his memory. How he would enjoy leaving New York for the north, if he could! Outwardly he only nodded gravely, with the judicial manner he invariably assumed in moments of business.

"After lunch yesterday—though I didn't eat any, being so worked up—I heard from Prentiss, your man that has worked Monroe and adjacent counties for ten years, that he'd just mailed a letter to your office here, resigning. He's going West. So I'm down to see if you won't put me on in his place.

"See the advantage? I know the ground, the people; I can swing right in there; I can deliver the goods! You'll see! I don't want to go anywhere else; I'd be lost anywhere else. I'm so used to it. And I'm sure I could sell more goods for the Peerless than I ever did for the Apex. It's a better house. And besides, I wouldn't feel any too good toward the Apex crowd for letting me go!"

He was pleading now, like a man for his life. That job was a supreme necessity to him. There were evidences enough that he had not much money; that he was not financially equipped to remove with his family to a new field, to say nothing of the torture of uprooting to a man of his settled groove.

"You have children, perhaps, you wish to continue in school at Rochester?" asked Lemp. "You haven't told me much of yourself in your infrequent letters."

"No," answered the little man, staring hungrily at him. "There are just Abbie and myself. We never felt we could afford children. That territory doesn't carry much of a salary."

A momentary pang assailed Lemp's heart. Neither had he and Eunice had children. But they would have been welcomed had they come.

He stifled the feeling, and stared at Osgood curiously. "Just you and your wife?" he asked. "I should think that you would want to try new territory in that case. Just the adventure of it, the excitement of blazing new trails."

"New trails?" echoed Osgood, in incredulous dismay. "When I'm past forty?"

"That's only a start," answered Lemp reflectively. "A man doesn't begin to think till he's past forty, Tom. I'd like to blaze a new trail—somewhere—myself."

He was thinking of the old dream that he and Eunice had laid by.

"But you don't," observed Osgood slyly. "You stay right here in New York."

His inference was unmistakable. "It is not because I am afraid to try that I do not blaze that trail," he answered quietly. "I owe this old town a debt which I can never repay. It taught me, early in the game, to conquer fear."

But Tom Osgood had not heard the words. His mind, turning constantly inward through stress of his plight, had returned to that job he so ardently desired.

"That's the situation, Ed," he imparted huskily, throwing all his scattered forces into a final, despairing appeal. "I'm offering you my services for the best money you can give me to start; I don't think I ought to get less than the Apex people paid me; but we could adjust that, I think. And, if I get the chance, I'll give that new relative of the Apex manager, who's grabbed my job, a run for his money, I'll promise you that!"

Wriggling in his chair, he pursued his theme with the fierceness of a cornered rat.

"Abbie feels the same as I do. When I left she felt the thing, turning out as it has, with Prentiss leaving, was a chance from Heaven. I can't bear to think how she'll feel if I go back, licked, and tell her I couldn't get it. Put yourself in my place, Ed!"

He stared hungrily again and summed up, with a tremor in his voice:

"If I get the chance, I'm your debtor for life. If I don't, I'll take the train back to Rochester in the morning and see if there's something else I could pick up, though it's dull in the old town just now. But I've got to do something; I haven't much—money."

He stopped, swallowing dryly, and mutely watched Lemp, who sat pondering. It was a problem he had to settle. Old friend-

ship, inexplicable as he now felt it to have been, won with him.

He looked up. "Tom," he said, "you have been misinformed regarding my position with the Peerless concern, I think. I am not the sales manager, but the office manager.

Hugh Lloyd, the sales manager, is out of town. He will return to-morrow or the next day. I will use my influence to procure for you an interview with him at the earliest moment after he returns. You must do your best to sell yourself to him. Lloyd is a mighty good fellow; but in business he's the perfection in that anomaly of modern business that makes for results—a hard-headed razor."

He was eying Osgood sharply. Tom shivered timorously, forgetting in his ragging egotism even to thank Lemp for this evidence of interest.

"I've heard of him," he said, "from Prentiss." His tone trembled. "But I'll do my best to please him, if he gives me the chance."

"All right." Lemp rose; he had heard quite enough of this sort of talk. "You've had a long trip, following a sleepless night," he suggested kindly. "You'd better turn in now and get some sleep. Perhaps Lloyd will get back to-morrow; he's coming from the West. And you will need to be at your best to talk with him."

"Yes, Ed; that's a good idea, I guess," dully answered Osgood, getting to his feet. "You're mighty fine, old man. Will you see Lloyd after I do, and say all you can for me?"

Lemp nodded as he surveyed the pitiful figure, this little man near middle life who was palpably so close to the end of his resources, who had not even the asset of a "bluff." As was always the case in personal affairs, his warm heart rose in arms against his cold business judgment.

He nodded silently, while the tongue of his mind murmured: "Yes, you poor little mutt, I'll say all I can for you—and more!"

He showed Osgood to his room and lighting his pipe, picked up the volume by Dumas, and resumed reading the adventures of three fearless musketeers.

He heard Tom stirring about in his

room; then for a few moments all was quiet, and he supposed his guest had fallen asleep.

His pipe did not draw well, and he tiptoed back for a package of cleaners that he kept in the kitchen. Osgood's door was ajar, and Tom sat by the window with his back toward Lemp, whose approach he did not hear. He was still fully dressed, and was bent over some task to the accompaniment of a queer, rhythmic, swishing sound.

Lemp's gaze absorbed Tom's employment and grew quizzical, sparkling with laughter. Taking more pains than before to remain unheard, he passed on and secured his cleaners, and tiptoed back to the living-room to resume his reading of the exploits of Dumas's three heroes.

After a time he heard the bedroom door close; then, more dimly, the creakings produced by uneasy tossings, and once a dismal, muffled groan. It told of the little man's continued state of cruel nervousness as he writhed, hoping and fearing Fate as it would accompany Lloyd, the sales manager of the Peerless concern who was now speeding from the West.

Later, after Mrs. Lemp had returned home and retired, she opened drowsy eyes at the sound of a low chuckle from her husband, who stood by the dresser removing his collar.

"What is it, Edward?" she asked.

"Nothing, Eunice. Go to sleep," he told her.

Because of his fine instincts, exercised in behalf of the guest, who had now fallen into a troubled sleep of exhaustion in his chamber, he could not tell even Eunice, his pal, what he had seen when he passed Tom's open door.

Osgood, oblivious to the fact that he had not closed his door, had sat humped in his chair like an African, toiling toward an immaculate appearance the following day.

He had brought along paste, cloths, brushes, and all the paraphernalia—and was shining his shoes!

Eunice Lemp was a placid woman. But even her well-controlled nerves were ruffled by Tom Osgood's antics the following morning and over the luncheon hour.

"I hardly think Lloyd will return before to-morrow," Lemp had suggested at the

breakfast table: "and anyway, he'd have quite a little of accumulated business awaiting him. Better take it easy to-day, Tom, and stroll around and look over the city."

Tom, buttering a roll, fidgeted. "He might get back to-day," he suggested with timorous hope, "and he might have a moment he could give me, say, this afternoon. Of course, use your own judgment, Ed; but you see it's a serious matter with me. Perhaps I'd better stick around here, and if there came a chance to see him, provided he gets in, you could phone me and I'd come right down. Of course, I can't spend too much—time. If there's nothing here I must be getting back to Rochester, and see if I can dig up something."

His shifting gaze dropped to his plate. Lemp could not resist casting a sparkling glance at Eunice, who sat, lovely, in morning gown and crisp breakfast cap. Demure little imps flashed in response from her dark eyes.

"All right, Tom," assented Lemp cordially. "Stick around, and I'll send you word if there is any."

So Tom "stuck around" all the morning, and made Eunice as nervous as a resitive cat would have done. She perceived early that he did not want to talk, for which he was profoundly grateful. However, he padded miserably about the living-room, unable to occupy himself with reading or resting for more than a few minutes at a time, and altogether presented the aspect of a man with several loads on his mind, all of them of the interior pattern.

For a long time, too, he busied himself in the bath-room, from which issued mysterious swashing sounds.

At luncheon he ate but little, and that in jerky fashion. Once he almost jumped from his chair as the telephone bell jangled. But it was a call from one of Mrs. Lemp's friends. He eyed her almost with resentment as she returned to her seat.

At last however, at two o'clock, came a second call. Mrs. Lemp hastened to answer it. Osgood, seated in an uneasy chair in the living-room, bent forward with tortured face, his hands gripping the arms tensely.

"Yes, dear," he heard Mrs. Lemp say.

His pulses leaped with anticipation. This gave place to blank despair as he waited, while she listened at the telephone. It was probably some other woman friend who was telephoning to her. Women always called one another "dear."

"Oh, very well, dear," he heard her say.

The little man heard the swish of her silken skirts as she returned toward the living-room. He cowered in his chair, staring hungrily. Perhaps, after all—perhaps—

"Oh, Mr. Osgood," came Mrs. Lemp's low, vibrant, musical voice; "Mr. Lemp was phoning. He has arranged that you meet Mr. Lloyd, who will give you a few minutes at three o'clock."

Up from his chair sprang Tom Osgood, as if shot therefrom by some fantastic spring. His webbed little face turned red and white, thus furnishing a vivid contrast to his blue mood of a moment previous.

"Oh, Mrs. Lemp—thank you!" he stammered. "I guess I'll start down-town now, if you don't mind, and hang around. I want to see Mr. Lemp again for a few minutes before I see Mr. Lloyd."

Eunice didn't mind at all, and in a few moments she sat enjoying the first moments of peace she had experienced since rising. Tom Osgood was about as calm company as an equinoctial storm.

Presently, while passing the bath-room toward the kitchen, to give some directions to the maid, she glanced in at the open door. She stopped and stared, then went in to investigate.

The early spring weather remained raw, and the steam-pipes of the apartment were purring. The radiator was Mrs. Lemp's magnet.

Ranged, neatly drying over its top, was an array of the Osgood laundry. A pair of cotton half-hose of raven hue, and a suit of B. V. D.'s and two handkerchiefs had been washed with toilet soap in the bathtub and hung thereon.

Underneath these intimate necessities of wear, placed so to protect them from streaks of iron-rust from the radiator, Osgood had carefully laid one of his hostess's best, embroidered towels.

Instant battle-light leaped into the lady's

usually placid eyes. She stretched forth vengeful hands to cast the garments into a corner and to rescue her insulted towel.

Midway, her slender, beautifully manicured hands fell helplessly at her sides. She shook her head with a hopeless gesture and turned away.

Whatever else he was, Osgood was a guest!

Nor, she decided, with the fine instincts roused by this fact of his guesthood, would she tell her husband of the incident.

Osgood would doubtless retrieve his laundry upon his return. It should be a deep, dark secret between them.

"Now, see here, Tom," cautioned Lemp in his office, one minute before three o'clock, "Lloyd's a cross between a pile-driver and a cleaver. Mind what I tell you. Not a syllable to him about hard luck or personal affairs. Just business, see? And buck up! You're not going to the death-chair at Sing Sing. You're going to ask for what is your inalienable right—a job!"

"I'll remember," gulped the trembling little Tom, and walked jerkily out of the office and down the corridor. Lemp watched him go with a slow shake of the head.

In five minutes he was back, a victim of the *n*th degree of suspense.

"I can't make him out," he throbbed miserably. "He's—terrible! I'm afraid he got me—tangled. He wants to see you."

It was fifteen years later, as it seemed to the little man nervously pacing Edward Lemp's office. In reality it was less than fifteen minutes.

Sales Manager Lloyd, a man with spiky, blond hair, a cold-blue eye that could bore through chilled steel, and shoulders that continued to advertise the fact that a number of years before he had decked the roster of all-American football for three seasons, banged a massive fist on his desk following a verbal give-and-take.

"I tell you, Lemp, this is too much and then some!" he bawled. "Prentiss has resigned, yes; but hang it! I'd have asked him to do it in another month, for I've got a *real* man in mind to put in his place, a

modern product that hates grooves like an incipient traitor hates Clémenceau, the Tiger of France!

"And here you want me to put on another of these blasted old automatons, that walks up and down instead of ahead—"

"He's younger than I am," interposed Lemp, wearily mopping his damp brow.

"Yes, he is, not!" yowled Lloyd. "You're the youngest man in this concern!"

"He'll work his head off for you," put in Edward again.

"He hasn't any head to work off!" growled Lloyd. "He's an old woman!"

Lemp nodded slowly and rose. "Yes, I guess he is," he admitted with deep guile. "I see I can't camouflage him any to you. I'm sorry to have taken your time, old man. You see, he's an old friend of mine, as I told you, and I figured it's only a matter of the chance, anyway. It's up to him to win or fail. And we need a man, right away. Well, I'll tell him. By-by!"

"Wait!" Lloyd banged the table again and scowled down at it. Lemp waited, his face and his dark eyes inscrutable, while his cunning leaven worked quickly.

"Tell him I'll put him on!" exploded Lloyd, glowering affectionately at the man who looked like Balzac. "You win, you old arch-plotter with the limber tongue!"

"But I don't want to see him again, and he's got to make good, right from the very start."

"Tell him to get back to Rochester. I'll write him instructions there. And get t' hell out of here!"

The spring twilight was deepening. After a hasty early dinner, served in jiffy-time for the jubilant Osgood's convenience, he stood, bag in hand, at the door to the Lemp's apartment, mouthing his exuberant farewells.

He was going to catch a subway train for the station, and was explaining his abruptness in deciding to return thus precipitately to the moil. He had explained it about a dozen times.

Unleashed like mountain torrents had been his speech since Lemp returned to the office with the glad news. Yet its scope

was singularly restricted. It concerned only the "life saver" of the new job.

"Abbie will be so pleased, so relieved!" he bleated. "I'm glad I sent her that telegram first thing. How can I ever repay you, Ed, for your kindness, and you, Mrs. Lemp? It's great to know a fellow has such friends in the world, when he's down and out!"

"I wish I could stay over to-night and tomorrow to visit the theater and see a little of the town, as you both suggested; but I don't feel I can afford the time. I must get back to Rochester and prepare to start the new job as soon as Mr. Lloyd sends instructions. Oh! I feel now as if I could breathe again!"

Eunice had grown used to his fantastic exuberance by this time. She only smiled tolerantly.

A transitory shadow of worry renewed traversed Osgood's brow, and snarled it into its accustomed creases. "I wonder if I can hold this new job?" he quavered. "I'm getting along in years!"

Thrusting back a pitying disgust, Lemp rallied him for the nth time. "You're all right, Tom. A man is only as old as he feels."

He added: "Mrs. Lemp and I would be glad to see you and Mrs. Osgood if ever again we get up in the dear old country. Where in the city are you living now?"

"Oh," answered Osgood, "we're not in the city. For the last year we've been living out on the farm, in the town of Daphne, and I've been taking the trolley into town. Didn't I tell you? I guess I was too worried about losing my job to think of anything else. But, thanks to you, Ed, I've got my foothold again."

"What farm is that you're on?" asked Lemp. "One you're renting, I suppose."

"Oh, no," answered Tom, rather indifferently. "I own it!"

Lemp's dark eyes dilated as he pursued: "You remember old William Beck's farm? That's it. He was my uncle. He died and left it to me."

"Well," gasped Lemp after a stunned moment, "what have you been worrying about? Don't you work it?"

"What do I know about farming?" an-

swered Tom, with a touch of irritation, as if others had asked him that question. "We save rent, of course, and raise enough stuff to eat with part-time from the hired man in the neighborhood; but it takes a good share of my salary from the job to pay the taxes on the darned place!"

"Well, I really must go. Abbie and I will be glad to have you stop off and pay us a flier, if ever you're through up that way." Thank you both for your kindness to a man in hard luck. Well, good-by!"

Grabbing his bag, he shot out of the door and for the elevator, a unique little figure in gray, worried now lest he miss his train.

Lemp walked slowly into the living-room and stood staring from the window. Mrs. Lemp approached him.

"That farm he spoke of?" she asked. "Is it an abandoned farm of some kind?"

His eyes, turned to hers, held a strange look.

"It's one I used to wish I owned," he answered. "It's one of the richest farms

in Monroe County. It's worth fifty thousand dollars, if it's worth a cent!"

While she gazed at him, overwhelmed, while to her mind rushed the memory of their buried dream, he stared out over the great city, now winking awake in its glories of the night. In this city their lot was irretrievably cast, while their hearts were up among the hills toward which Osgood would soon be hurrying.

"What is there to it, I wonder?" he asked, thinking of the strangely mixed scheme.

"I wonder!" responded his wife in a hushed tone.

Then came to Lemp his master compensation for the business of living. It was his inextinguishable sense of humor.

He laughed great, bellowing, thunderous laughter, the mirth of Balzac, whom he resembled in person and in mind, and did not know it.

His mirth was hysterically echoed by his mate.

A WAYSIDE PRAYER

REMEMBER, artist soul of mine,
This green, gold, white, and blue
Of May-time in the morning shine,
When every leaf is new;

How cotton-soft the white clouds rise
To drift in laggard train
Through the warm stretch of azure skies
Washed clean by April rain.

Remember dancing o'er the grass
Winds such as Corot knew,
Flinging a fragrance as they pass
Of lilacs drenched with dew;

The thrush upon the tall oak's limb,
In leafy, high survey,
Tossing the rapture of his hymn
Through the green fields of May.

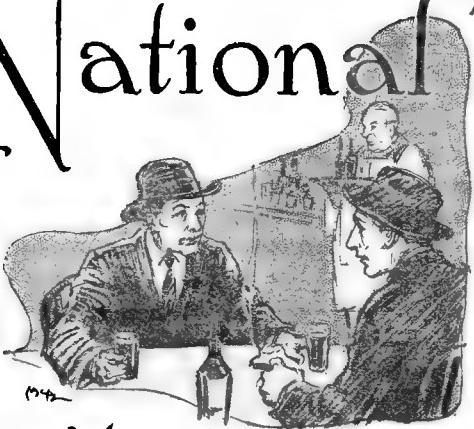
Hold these, my soul, inviolate—
Clear colors of the spring,
Soft winds that bid the thrushes mate
And set the leaves aswing;

Bird song and lilacs drenched with dew
Keep as they are to-day,
That they may pass in dream review
When sleep has had her way!

Eleanor Robbins Wilson

First National Bank of Faro

by Raber Mundorf



COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE.

I.

WHAT first attracted me to Mr. Betts was his thoughtful gaze on the W. S. S. placard behind the bar, and then the half-guilty attention he bestowed on his well-filled glass.

He must have caught my grin, for he inched toward me with a friendly, apologetic smile.

"Saving's done in some onusal ways," he confided softly. "There's folks that says the saloon takes the poor man's hard-earned dollar, and that gamblin' is a curse. Mebbe they're right: I ain't sayin'."

"But that guv'ment savin' sign there," he went on, encouraged by my discreet nod, "reminds me of a saloon an' gamblin' place that was a regular savings bank for its customers. Yes, sir; the only deposit-slips used was the bar-checks, and it seemed as though about all the depositors had to show for their money was a headache the morning after. But it actually saved money for them—with interest."

Having thus succeeded in tickling my curiosity, the stranger perversely lapsed into an embarrassed silence. "What's the answer?" I demanded, laughing. And, taking advantage of the freemasonry among all men at Jordan's, I towed him to a corner table and signaled Mike to stand by with the appropriate refreshments.

Some queer fish—quite soberly speaking—run into this famous café; usually swirled east with the crowds that eddy off Broadway's restless stream at Times Square.

Even Mr. Betts—Tim Betts, of California, as he introduced himself—was not without striking characteristics. His big frame, fleshed to portliness, was draped decently in a quiet suit of pepper-and-salt; his brown-straw hat, with the wide, floppy brim, and the broad-toed shoes, were not in themselves conspicuous.

Yet, somehow, Mr. Betts's appearance suggested a prosperous rancher not altogether at ease in his "going-to-town" togs. The genial smile, however, masked a shrewdness and inflexibility of purpose: that of a man who knew what he was about and was not lightly to be imposed upon.

Strange tales are unfolded at Jordan's. Mr. Betts eased the strain across his chest by loosing the top coat-button; mopped a bald forehead, and began. Excepting many quaint embellishments, unhappily forgotten, I have endeavored here to set down his story in a straightforward narrative. It is an odd tale of the desert; of good cloaked in evil; of baffling motives; and of a friendship that almost passes understanding.

I gathered that when Macdonald made his nerve-racking drive into Death Valley

he was not the sinister figure that Dry Gulch later was to blaspheme. Tightfisted? Well, perhaps a bit careful of the pennies; but ready to stake his all at the challenge of any big venture.

Men liked his nerve. They liked *him*. So that when Macdonald announced his determination to ferret out the mysterious source of "Death Valley" Scotty's treasure, the half-dozen seasoned prospectors he invited were with him to a man.

The adventurers hotfooted it through the entire length of Lost Valley and down through the dread valley that yieldeded Scotty his never-failing supply of gold. They found plenty of salt licks and enough deposits of borax to chase all the roaches in Christendom, but never a sign of Scotty's treasure cache. So they emerged from Death Valley at the south, where the Amargosa Wash enters; having acquired nothing but disappointment, and a thirst that charted their course direct, as the crow flies, toward the nearest saloon at Tecopa.

Then, a day's journey south along the Amargosa River, the prospectors made the strike that established Dry Gulch. At this point in the river-bed they discovered placer deposits yielding as high as six hundred dollars' worth of gold to the pan.

Here, almost on the boundary line between the California counties of Inyo and San Bernardino, with Needle Peak visible to the northwest, and Owl's Head and Rotten Peak to the south, the prospectors settled down among the lava beds, the mesquite, and the cacti, to prove their luck. For mascot, they had their choice of scorpion, horned toad, or rattler—lurking among the sagebrush and yucca.

II.

THE next glimpse of Macdonald discovers him at his mahogany desk in the president's office of an important bank in San Francisco, with vast lumber interests and other investments in the background.

While the men who shared with him the perils of Death Valley still plug along at Dry Gulch, working claims which seem as productive as ever, yet scarcely a cent wealthier than when they stumbled into this arid region several years before!

Every situation has its explanation. The Dry Gulchers pointed the accusing finger at Macdonald, and their allusions to him reeked of brimstone and sulfur.

In all fairness, however, Macdonald could not be held responsible for the gambling mania that gripped the camp coincident with almost the first day's panning of gold.

Macdonald alone kept his sanity. He panned gold diligently; accumulated his "pile"; and promptly announced his intention of returning to the coast, there to "be somebody."

Upon leaving, he aroused tremendous enthusiasm by describing his plan to build in Dry Gulch, immediately, the "niftiest little saloon and gambling emporium east of Frisco and west of Monte Carlo."

The first impulse of the Dry Gulchers who had held the aces in the last games had been to gather up their vast winnings and bear Macdonald company on his journey. But now, nothing would do but that everybody must wait to pass opinion on the proposed B. Burns Saloon and Casino. This result was no doubt what Macdonald had coolly calculated upon.

Then Mr. "Foley" Dugan came out of nowhere, opened the famous General Store, and made living so comfortable for the Dry Gulchers that none felt the urge to hasten away. "Foley" (née Pat) Dugan, was a wiry little Irishman, addicted to those rambling whiskers vulgarly classified as "foliage." His capability amounted to genius.

"Doc" Yard's request for a guitar, and the professor's order of a costly importation of yellow-pine timber and incense cedar trim for his pretentious bungalow, were all alike to Foley. Whatever his customers wanted they got. It was under Foley's stimulating activity that the crude shacks straggling through the rough mining camp gave way to an orderly arrangement of comfortable frame or adobe cottages.

Only a handful of chosen worthies were added to the original few inhabitants. The Dry Gulchers were exclusive—liked to pick their company, and the splendid isolation of Dry Gulch assisted their purpose. Moreover, every inhabitant did plain and

fancy shooting, conscientiously and well; therefore, trespassers about the sluices and staked-out claims were few and all accounted for.

Foley made life bearable until the B. Burns Saloon and Casino bloomed swiftly and exotically out of the desert. Its surpassing magnificence fulfilled Macdonald's promise to the letter.

The saloon shone resplendent in rose-wood, mahogany, and plate-glass. It was stocked with really choice vintages and liquors, and a small but potent side-line of narcotics which put curious strangers gently to slumber while the natives dallied with high stakes in the casino adjoining.

The casino itself, an extension wing of the saloon, was equipped not only with the most up-to-date gambling paraphernalia, but also furnished tastefully with cosy chairs, handsome tables, draperies, and valuable prints, besides affording an intimate little grill where eccentric persons might consume food or the coroner hold an inquest undisturbed.

"Sure thing—Macdonald has went an' done his damnedest!" chortled Mandy Swatt at the rollicking house-warming; an opinion that every Dry Gulcher shared, then and thereafter.

That the B. Burns coiled its tentacles about the community so quickly, however, was due in no small measure to magnetic Doc Yard, who combined the genius of versatility with the indomitable spirit of the pioneer.

Monotony was death to him. He chafed under the eternal sameness of draw poker, California jack, dom pedro, fan-tan, and ace-in-the-pot. Inspired by the gorgeous new casino, he introduced into camp a volume of the immortal Hoyle. Starting at "A," with "All Fours," he led his enthusiastic comrades straightway through all the card and dice games in the book, to the Glossary.

Thus gambling permanently became the ruling motive for Dry Gulch's existence. Before long only the highest possible stakes seemed worth playing for, so that the camp routine came to be fixed in this wise:

For six days the miners labored at pan, rocker, and sluice, washing out the fine,

golden scales, coarser grains, and even nuggets from the "placer" gravel. Hardly a claim failed to pan at least its fifty ounces of gold daily.

Then, on Saturday afternoon each miner gathered together his weekly dust, tidied up a bit, and repaired to the General Store. Foley weighed out the dust and took each miner's orders for necessities and luxuries.

And on the evening of the same day (or in the wee hours of the next), each miner and Foley came forth from the B. Burns Saloon and Casino and made his more or less erratic way to his own neat cottage—virtually flat, cleaned out, busted.

Macdonald had taken his weekly toll.

The more skilful among them might have outwitted their evil genius and made the "pile" each had set his heart upon, had it not been for this unwritten law: before leaving the casino the winners in the inter-Hoyle card or dice match must play the roulette-wheel, faro, or other gaming device operated by the *house*.

This practise originally had expressed the community's gratitude for Macdonald's munificent gift. But it was continued, through force of habit and precedent, when plain Macdonald became known to them as "Pluto" Macdonald, and already was cussed as a "grafter." Besides, every Dry Gulcher cherished a sneaking notion that if he only could beat the B. Burns and Macdonald just *once*, he could die smiling.

As soon as he would signify his intention of "playing the house," however, all would be over but the shouting—and the proprietor did that. Not that everything was not fair, open, and above-board! It was, so far as any Dry Gulcher knew. Nevertheless, when Pluto hung over the bar this neatly lettered quotation from his favorite poet—

Here's a bottle and an honest friend!
What wad ye wish for mair, man?

—the Doc was quick to paraphrase an epitaph by the same poet and scribble on a placard below:

Here lies old Pluto—*honest man*;
Cheat him, devil—if you can!

Then, for he was in a bibulous and a merry mood, he borrowed a can of paint

from Foley, and, poising his brush over the B. Burns sign outside the saloon, changed the letter "s" to "t."

"'B. Burnt' is right," conceded even the staidest among the Dry Gulchers.

III.

Doc YARD smote his guitar and lifted his voice in a quavering falsetto. From the opposite angle of the same window-seat, where Curley Q. likewise nested on the small of his back among the pillows, came the palpitant bleat of a ukulele in accompaniment.

Neither tried to brighten the corner where he was. Even the doc's crisply waxed mustache seemed to droop—blighted by the lugubrious air wailing forth beneath it:

"We found his bones 'mid the prickly pears,
With the gold he left behind him;
He'd got his and the crows got theirs—
We laughed ho! ho! to find him."

He slurred into the chorus, and the uncouth refrain was taken up perfunktorily and dolefully by the assembled Dry Gulchers:

"O-o-o-h—
Let ill winds blow (if blow they must!)
Some miner's dust for me—
Should the dust be gold; for gold's the dust
I spend so glad and free."

There was neither "pep" nor grace to these pseudo chorus men. They did their job lying down: prone on Navajo rugs, or draped over wicker chairs or leather-upholstered benches round the professor's living-hall. After Saturday's revelry at the B. Burns, they always saw clearly the spiritual and economic wisdom of a day of complete rest.

They awaited the professor, knowing that in due season he would stir from his audible slumbers in the adjoining room. In unvarying order he would bawl for his bracing draft of forty-rod, cuss classically the imported Chinee who would bear in the cup, and eat with undisguised relish his imported breakfast herring and his porridge. Some men would have shuddered at the thought of food so early on Sunday—and did.

But as they watched the heat waves shimmer through the room, piping hot from alkaline dust and volcanic rock, their increasing morbidness had scant connection with the nauseating fumes of Ting Ling's cooking. Mandy Swatt—squinting moodily through his slanting eyes, and feebly stroking his drooping, mandarinlike mustachios—touched drawlingly on a phase of Dry Gulch's present problem:

"This here Mr. Jenks, new official manager for the B. Burns, I calcoolate made the usoosal killin' for Pluto the fust Sat'day he's been on the job."

Jenks was the fourth incumbent of the managerial chair.

None of the morose miners had energy or incentive to dispute this assertion. The doc began to twang tentatively on his guitar when the mat curtaining the doorway was thrust aside, and the professor shuffled into the room. His grizzled beard kept him well under cover, although, where his face was cleared of whiskers, there rose a bulbous nose—like a glowing, crimson sun, as perceived through a thicket.

The professor sank into the armchair reserved for him, and these abrupt, oracular words rumbled out amid a dense cloud of pipe-smoke:

"Men o' Dry Gulch, we have been toiling many a year. What have we to show for it? Nothing! And we shall have nothing so long as we spend our all in that sink of iniquity, the B. Burns Saloon and Casino.

"This situation is by no means new. I mention it now only because we must *do something*, and that quickly. There's no use blinding ourselves to the fact that the gold in the alluvial deposits which form our claims is running thin. When we shut up shop, will it be as bankrupts, or as men with fortunes in our belts? I have a plan to set before ye.

"We've all prospected on both sides of the river-bed, but have found no trace of gold. Despite this, I have a feeling that there must be some rich vein or mother lode hereabouts. I mentioned my belief to the B. Burns's former manager, and Curry suggested that we have a competent mining engineer look the ground over.

"Should the mining expert discover favorable signs, we could have him begin operations. His new activity would divert our minds from this vile gambling obsession. That is all we need. It would enable us to amass fortunes, even though the expert's operations should prove unsuccessful. Ye're all agreed, I see, to my plan.

"Our one salvation is to pour gold into the hands of one of our number and see that he gets away from town before he has the chance to spend it. He will endeavor to meet the mining expert and make the fit arrangements. I may mention a Mr. John Truscott, whose name Curry gave me.

"Perhaps, when our representative is beyond reach of Dry Gulch's baneful influence, he will have the eyes to see and the will to do what can be done to reclaim us from our evil ways. But, above all, let us act justly toward him. The evil genius of Dry Gulch may pursue him and prevail against him and steal away the money. Therefore we must not tie his hands: the money must be made *his*, to do with it as the spirit moves him."

This whole plan was so largely a gamble that it fascinated the Dry Gulchers!

Not a miner was missing when the band gathered in the General Store early the following Saturday afternoon. Mose Tuttle, self-appointed assistant to the professor, laid on the table a fresh poker deck for each man. The professor plunged straight into the business at hand.

"Gentlemen," he announced, "we shall now, one and all, cut for highest cards."

Tabulated results showed that Curley Q., Limpid Brooks, and Tiny Tim Betts had drawn aces.

The crowd surged excitedly toward the table to watch the three cut again.

Curley Q. exposed the queen of hearts; Limpid Brooks, the king of spades; and Tiny Tim, the ace of diamonds.

"It's yourn—an' congratolations are in order!" cried Mose, officiously indicating the sacks of precious dust which represented a week's strenuous labor on the part of the conscientious miners.

Almost any man would be flustered if five hundred thousand and a weighty responsibility were thrust upon him by the

turn of a card. Shifting his huge bulk from one foot to the other, Tiny Tim finally responded in a hoarse voice:

"Gentlemen, I wants to say as how I appreciates this opportunity to help put some sense in Dry Gulch. An' if there is any way of givin' you men any backbone to buck this here B. Burns Casino, you can count on Tim to try his level best to do it."

Several hands flew unconsciously to holsters; but suddenly remembering the occasion, the men fell in with the spirit of Tim's good intentions and cheered him lustily.

As had been agreed upon, Tim paid Foley Dugan for enough provisions to last the penniless miners during the coming week. Toasts were drunk from ~~private~~ flasks. Then Tim and his gold were personally conducted to the buckboard waiting in front of Dugan's livery-stable before the flustered miner could head, as in habit bound, toward the B. Burns Saloon.

Cal Cutty, pony-express rider—more familiarly but unobtrusively referred to as "Calipers"—mounted his bronco and significantly tapped the guns that were to guard Tim and his treasure on the road to Tecopa.

A mighty chorus of: "Good luck, ye ol' bald-headed son-of-a-gun!" welled from a dozen brazen throats. Tiny Tim smiled mistily, resolutely unbent his gaze from the B. Burns Saloon, and was off.

IV.

MOSE TUTTLE averred that they'd kissed their coin good-by, when—with a dozen stout boots resting expectantly on the polished brass rail—it was discovered that Tiny Tim had not bequeathed them the price of a single drink.

"Any galoot what would overlook a im-
portant thing like that, an' throw down his
pals, can't be counted on," maintained
Mose darkly. A dozen elbows leaned de-
jectedly on the mahogany bar, and a like
number of heads wagged mournfully at the
evil omen.

Tragedy was averted, however. Mr. Jenks never batted an eye as he said in a hearty voice:

"Gentlemen, don't let a little thing like money stand between you and your favor-

ite beverage. Your credit's good at the B. Burns till kingdom come. This one's on the house. Step right up, gentlemen!"

Jenks proved himself a good host, and a nonchalant but attentive listener. After the dozen generously filled glasses were lifted simultaneously for the sixth round, Jenks was able to retire quietly to the grill. There he penned in code a terse report of the day's proceedings. Rousing Indian Pete from his wickiup, Jenks despatched him post-haste to Tecopa with the message.

This third and most up-to-date report of the Dry Gulchers' recent doings was on the wire, relayed to San Francisco, and in Pluto Macdonald's hands almost before Tiny Tim, in Tecopa, had finished rinsing the alkali dust out of his throat with aged-in-the-wood alcohol, preparatory to entraining for the coast. Efficiency was Jenks's middle name.

Days passed without word or sign from Tiny Tim. Hope flickered, then burned to ashes. "What can yuh expect of a shorthorn who can't remember to set up a drink?" Mose reminded his comrades, and they could make no answer.

So another Saturday came, and Dry Gulch lapsed into its former graceless estate. The Hoyle Club ran full blast; the roulette ball clicked merrily as ever in the casino; keno, Klondike, and three-card monte had their innings. Macdonald, humorously disguised as the goddess of "Chance," accepted their devotions and all their gold dust.

And the seventh was a day set aside, as usual, for penitence. Doc, guitar and ukulele wailed, sobbed and bled dolorously, until Jerusalem's "Weeping Wall" became a rollicking cabaret when compared to the professor's bungalow with its penitential congregation.

But on Monday a dozen assorted consciences actually did prick surprisingly when Tiny Tim—smiling, optimistic, and a wee bit cocky—suddenly reappeared.

There followed him from the buckboard a tall, lean individual, distinguished by a close-cropped Vandyke and a quiet, self-contained manner.

Tim introduced him simply as John Truscott, as this internationally recognized

expert preferred to be known. Although the miner, in a confidential aside to the professor, whispered that Truscott could tag after his name if he wanted to: M.S., Ph.D., C.E., M.E., Ch.E., and so on through the alphabet.

When Truscott looked, his eyes bored right through you. When he spoke, men jumped to do his bidding. His crisp, incisive tones carried the ring of authority and the power to command.

Under his serious, penetrating gaze the Dry Gulchers felt that this was no time for effusive greeting. Even Mose Tuttle's ornate speech of welcome—ready, as ever, on the tip of his facile tongue, was swallowed hastily in silence.

After a few pointed queries the mining expert picked up his bag. The professor immediately placed his bungalow at their guest's disposal. But Truscott, thanking him, replied that doubtless he would be comfortable enough at the B. Burns, of which he had heard. His tone, while courteous, permitted of no argument.

Their supper over, the Dry Gulchers gravitated toward the B. Burns and hung around the bar, at last inquiring casually for Mr. Truscott. Jenks reported, however, that Truscott was "busy with papers, and hardly would be down." Jenks himself disappeared for the rest of the evening, and left his bartender, young Darrow, to do the honors.

"Sort of unsociable cuss—that Truscott," observed the Doc. Notwithstanding which he and his comrades were inclined to be more impressed than peevish.

Next morning Truscott inspected the river-bed, through the camp and beyond; scrutinized both banks and the adjoining areas.

He devoted the afternoon to a second and closer examination of the river-bed, and the western bank which rose precipitously above it. He repeatedly chipped off fragments of the rock. And the following day he concentrated on the river-bed and western bank at the northern extremity of the camp.

Indian Pete made the rounds while the Dry Gulchers were at supper and summoned them to confer with Truscott at the

B. Burns. They found John Truscott standing behind a small table covered with a sheaf of notes and penciled diagrams. Without preamble he began:

"Dry Gulch's source of gold is, I am convinced, a gravel-bed of curiously limited breadth and indeterminate length. The breadth fronts on Dr. Yard's claim—an abnormally rich field from which, perhaps ages ago, a swiftly running stream carried and deposited the gold along the river-course.

"These river-bed deposits are almost exhausted, as you are aware. The next logical point of attack is the *length* of the gravel-bed, which apparently extends westward from the river. Traces of gold on the western bank at this frontage are clearly defined. Of course this gravel-bed underlies strata of hard, volcanic rock at least fifty feet deep. Hydraulic mining, operating on the face of the cliff, therefore is not feasible. It will be necessary to tunnel under this volcanic rock, on an approximate level with the river-bed. Drift mining, combined with sluicing, is demanded.

"I am willing to undertake the opening of a drift, and further development and operation. My affiliation with the Western Mining Development Company — whose representative I am here—places at my disposition the required machinery, skilled labor, and all facilities.

"In addition to my stipulated retaining-fee, Mr. Betts has deposited with me certain funds to be applied to such operations, subject to your approval. When these funds were all utilized in the preparatory work, the Western Mining Development Company would carry on the operations under the following agreement:

"Their legal title to a half interest in the mining claim and any profits derived therefrom; together with your pledge to defray half the current expenses. Such expenses might be heavy, and would have to be met promptly. On the other hand, the investment would seem decidedly promising. In my advisory capacity, I unhesitatingly urge it.

"I would appreciate having your decision as soon as possible. I leave to-morrow. Thank you." With an abrupt, stiff

bow, John Truscott gathered up his papers and left the room.

"What do yuh say we chew it over right away?" volunteered Betts. "Though I think we could do it more comfortably at the professor's," he added. Whereupon they adjourned, making a hurried exit past the bar.

The business was transacted in short order—as invariably was true when the professor actually set his brain to working.

"John Truscott," said he, from the depths of his easy-chair, "evidently is a man of knowledge and discernment. Mr. Betts investigated his qualifications, and found him an authority. His price is high—some of ye might call his conditions downright robbery—but brains and efficiency always do come high.

"Moreover, our peculiar problem can and should be solved by the *diversion* his operations bring. Remember, it is not a question of his producing results from the mining. Our present claims still are fruitful enough. If we give him as much as one-half the money we ordinarily hand to the B. Burns, and save the other half, our fortunes are made.

"Men o' Dry Gulch, I am in strong favor of informing John Truscott on the morrow that we accept his proposal. Those likewise in favor of it will say 'aye.'"

"Sure!" responded the Dry Gulchers, without a dissenting voice.

"Then it is agreed," the professor confirmed. "We shall recompense Mr. Betts for his outlay of money"—he coughed diffidently—"as soon as we are able. For the present we shall take a rising vote of thanks to Mr. Betts for his very good offices. Gentlemen, let us salute the savior of Dry Gulch!"

The willing Dry Gulchers bounded to their feet and gave three cheers, with a tiger for good measure, for Tiny Tim.

"It was nothin' at all—nothin' at all," Tiny Tim protested in confusion. "'Twas Dry Gulch's money, anyway, not mine. 'Cept fer a few reasonable incidentals in the way of refreshments and sich, I was careful not to spend a penny of it."

"Ah, shut up! Yuh've done a big thing fer Dry Gulch, mebbe, an' are too mule-

stubborn to own up to it," growled Mandy Swatt. With that the miners hoisted Tiny Tim to their shoulders and perspiring bore him in triumph to the B. Burns, where the whole party had a "night-cap"—or several.

The next morning John Truscott calmly received the news of their verdict, and departed for San Francisco, with the promise that he would make immediate arrangements to have the work begun.

V.

CURLEY Q. was the first to espy the caravan of mule-teams rolling across the desert toward Dry Gulch several weeks later, and heralded its approach by a whoop that brought every miner scuttling up the cliffs.

Before nightfall there had sprung up a camp of rough shacks and canvas, with drills and other machinery unloaded and in process of setting up, and a swarm of huskies getting swiftly down to operations. Truscott acted as director general, but the actual supervision of the men was delegated to his assistant, Farrel, a thick-set, beetling-browed, domineering person, who was everywhere, bawling orders and seeing that they were obeyed.

The professor's hope that Truscott and his work would act as a wholesome diversion in the community now seemed in a fair way toward realization. The Dry Gulchers actually did forsake the casino.

Then gravel rich in gold was uncovered near the mouth of the drift. This news came as a tonic to the Dry Gulchers who, with river-bed claims daily lessening in yield, had been on the raw edge of woe. Temptation to celebrate this good fortune was irresistible. And the only appropriate place for a celebration was the B. Burns. Macdonald had no reason to complain of his receipts these days.

Suddenly everything went wrong. There was a break in the gold-bearing gravel-bed. Truscott determined to tunnel straight ahead; but, day after day, virtually no gold assayed from the gravel uncovered. Finally he gave orders to extend the drift no farther: instead, to proceed from the break and start new tunnels off at various angles.

Adding to the Dry Gulchers' misfortunes

was the exhaustion of their river-bed claims to a point where, as the Doc put it, " You had to work like a sand-hog to make a bare living."

Fagged out each day, and utterly discouraged, they naturally resorted to the B. Burns for stimulant. In this condition of lowered physical and mental vitality, it was but a step from "cheering up" to recklessness—and thence to the gambling-tables. The stakes now were pitifully small. Still the urbane Jenks always was there with comforting predictions for a speedy change of luck. He went so far as to advance moderate loans on their I.O.U.'s.

Their "jinx" already was matched against them—wearing them down—sparring for the opportunity to land the final blows to their ambitions. The blows fell soon and swiftly.

Until recently the miners always had paid Foley promptly for everything. Late-ly, with luck dead against them, they had been running up little bills. Foley had been happy to accommodate them. But this Saturday, when their gold dust weighed at the General Store proved insufficient for their needs, the little Irishman seemed frankly distressed.

"I'm sorry, boys," at last he blurted out, "but I can't extend any more credit. Truth is, I've only got money enough to keep my business going and pay for the regular supplies. You know where my profits go—" pointing significantly toward the B. Burns. "Guess we're all in the same pickle," he sighed ruefully.

Foley had turned them down! They felt stunned—bewildered.

They drifted over to B. Burns. One glance at Jenks's glum face warned them of another blow impending. It fell.

"Gentlemen," murmured Jenks, "I'm sorry to say my principal has instructed me to sell drinks only for spot cash, and to close the casino. As it is, I've got in bad with the boss, I s'pose. He wires me to report at San Francisco and leave Darrow here in temporary charge."

Nothing seemed to matter after that. They received with callous indifference Farrel's peremptory invitation for them to meet him at the B. Burns on Monday.

At this conference the engineer's first words were reassuring. "We're now on the right track," he said. "Indications are that our last drift has located a rich field of gold-bearing gravel."

But this auspicious introduction was merely the feint that covered a knock-out blow.

"It's a question now of funds," Farrel went on. "Not only have we expended your contribution, but for many weeks we have been bearing the entire costs. The company advises me, in Mr. Truscott's absence, that we must have at least twenty-five thousand dollars from you at once." He paused for reply.

"We ain't got nothin'—yuh can't take blood from a stone," Tim Betts muttered finally.

"Then," pronounced Farrel icily, "I can't see anything else but for you to assign your interests to the company. The development is likely to be productive now, but there is no telling how long it will continue profitable. If we are going to take all the risks, we want all the profits."

The professor requested a moment to discuss the matter among themselves. When Farrel had stepped outside, the miners looked hopelessly at one another.

The professor frowned his pessimism. "We might invoke the law, because of the short notice they have given us in which to raise funds. Or we might secure financial backing on the strength of our prospects. Or we might force a new organization—and obtain capital through stock subscriptions.

"But how can we do *anything* without a little ready cash? Among us all there isn't enough money to defray the expenses of a man to the coast—to put up a proper front and make a successful dicker.

"I guess this does finish us," Betts sadly agreed. He gulped hard. "Only sorry I got you fellers into this," he said.

"It was not your fault, Tim," the professor broke in roughly. "We've simply played our last card—and it turns out a deuce. Our trouble has been, we've played too many cards. In plain words, we've made damn fools of ourselves."

"Since we're dead ones, we might as

well get the obsequies over," remarked the Doc with grim cheerfulness. At a nod from the professor he walked to the door and called Farrel.

"It's yours," rasped the professor.

The engineer smiled his cool satisfaction. "That's settled," he commented. In a tone less brutal:

"Mr. Truscott gave me instructions in such event. He thought he might be able to salvage something for you out of the wreck—some small interest in the mine, perhaps. It will be necessary for you to go to San Francisco to sign certain papers and arrange certain formalities. This memorandum shows the place and day for the appointment. He also instructed me to advance this sum for your traveling expenses."

Dropping the memorandum and a bulky roll of currency on the table, Farrel disappeared before the miners could catch their breath.

"We don't want their dirty money!" shouted Mandy Swatt, first to recover. "They beat us. We're sports enough to quit the game without hollerin' fer a hand-out!"

"Don't be hasty, man," the professor admonished, his brow in a thoughtful pucker. "There may be something behind this. For all that John Truscott was a clam, so far as conversation with us went, I think he felt kindly disposed toward us."

"Why not meet him half-way? Some of us are not as young as we once were. If we can save a few pennies out of this mess—and still maintain what little self-respect we have—I say, by all means let us do it."

"Truscott was a decent fellow, I must say," Tiny Tim coincided. "Mebbe he is a better friend than we realize."

So the Dry Gulchers determined to see it through.

VI.

PACKING up was simple. It only meant putting a few necessary garments into ancient valises—and walking out. Not even a key to turn in a lock—where no doors ever had been locked!

Moved by common impulse, the miners trotted with their bags over to the profes-

sor's bungalow. They heard Ting Ling shuffling behind the curtained doorway and his occasional, lisping, singsong words—indications that the professor was breakfasting.

As the men quietly assumed their accustomed positions, the professor's gruff voice came to them:

"Where are you going, boy?"

Ting Ling answered in a subdued falsetto: "Me go 'long Mist' Fallel. Me solly no go 'long you, professo'."

A momentary silence, then the professor cleared his throat savagely: there was a clatter of knife and fork, the scraping of a chair pushed back, and an angry grunt:

"Something's the matter with the damned herring this morning!"

The curtain was shoved aside and the professor growled a short "good morning." Ting Ling helped him out of the dressing-gown and into a frock coat of uncertain period. The professor took his top hat from the Chinaman; in return thrusting into Ting Ling's astonishingly reluctant hand what looked like a roll of bank-notes.

The Dry Gulchers, faces set, filed over to Dugan's Livery and climbed into the waiting buckboards. Foley Dugan himself shambled down the steps from the store. "Thought I'd go along as far as Tecopa," he vouchsafed.

"Who'll take care of the store, Foley?" dully remonstrated Mandy.

"Oh, Sam can 'tend to things for a day—or them development fellows can help themselves," Foley answered listlessly.

There was the pulsating hum and rattle of machinery and the smoke of stationary engines over at the drift—the men working as usual. But Farrel came to the edge of town to wave a good-by to the Dry Gulchers. Amusement, pity, and a little of contempt were artfully blended in his parting smile.

"Say, professor, let me plug 'im jest once!" pleaded the impulsive Jack Rogers. But the professor, his lips compressed in a wry smile, put forth a detaining hand. With one accord the men swept their town of Dry Gulch with a lingering, hungry gaze—then turned faces stonily to the desert before them.

Deeper, bitterer silence never brooded over a party of men leaving a drab, desert town to seek the lights of a city. Each was absorbed with his own reflections—and they were not pleasant.

Six men there were among them who remembered too well how they had staggered out of Death Valley and come, with the glad hurrah of discoverers into this land of gold and fortune. Life, luxuries, riches, ambitions—all had been theirs to command! Now they were outcasts from the camp they had founded, and the fortune had vanished with their hopes. They cursed their own weaknesses—truly! But in the breast of every man—the six pioneers and their fellows—there blazed a consuming hatred of Macdonald as the malevolent cause of their downfall. They held a grievous score to settle.

Even the farewell imbibings with Foley at the Prairie Dog in Tecopa failed to revive their drooping spirits. The function had all the appearance of a gloomy high executioner toasting the health of his prospective victims.

"Hope you make out all right, Foley, old pal," said Doc with what cheerfulness he could muster as the train pulled in and Foley Dugan shook hands all around.

"Me?" returned Foley in a hollow voice. "I shut up my store soon as I get back. They ain't no Dry Gulch for me with you fellers out of it."

VII.

MANY a curious passer-by paused at the intersection of certain streets in San Francisco early this sultry afternoon.

The professor's rusty frock coat and ancient topper; Doc's immaculate cutaway of the same vintage, and the other miners in attire reminiscent of the Forty-niners, in themselves courted attention.

But what chiefly held the speculative eye of onlookers was the animation and earnestness pervading this strange group.

"This ain't nowise like the other offices of the Western Mining Development Company I was in," Tiny Tim was insisting obstinately.

Mandy Swatt pointed an impatient finger at a penciled memorandum. "Here,

yuh kin see the address with yer own eyes. An' if these ain't the streets an' this the southwest corner, I ain't no judge of signs of directions."

"But, to all intents and purposes, this edifice is a bank," demurred the professor.

"Oh, let's try it, anyway," Doc recklessly cut in.

The professor arbitrarily herded the miners through the door of the imposing building. Their arrival was announced by the fierce hoorays of irreverent newsies outside, who evidently were looking forward to a hold-up of the cashier, looting, and gunplay. Safely inside, the professor inquired for Mr. John Truscott.

The elegantly uniformed functionary replied without surprise or hesitation. "Right this way, gentlemen, if you please. Mr. Truscott is expecting you."

They were trailing their guide awkwardly, in close file, when Jack Rogers gave a startled exclamation and halted so suddenly that Mandy Swatt marched up his shins. The miners ahead turned sharply. Following Jack's frozen stare, all saw grinning at them from the receiving teller's cage—Joe Brennan, a former bartender at the B. Burns!

Dumfounded, they moved forward—only to be greeted from the paying-teller's cage by smiling Charlie Cruse, also former bartender!

After this the sight of Jenks working busily in the cashier's sacred cubby-hole, and a glimpse through an open office door of Mr. Curry graciously shaking hands with a personage who must be at least a multimillionaire, could not surprise them into as much as the flicker of an eyelid.

"What sort of a dump is this, anyhow?" demanded Mandy Swatt huskily.

"What is the name of Pluto Macdonald's bank?" Doc countered through clenched teeth.

"Jumpin' jinrikisha!" gasped Tiny Tim. "I do believe this here is it."

Thirteen troubled miners looked at one another, at first questioningly, then sternly. Their jaws squared. If Pluto Macdonald was to be seen, they had something important to say to him before they went away.

The attendant led them through a spacious, handsomely appointed reception-room. He gave a peculiar knock at a "Private" door opposite, then ushered them in.

They were met by the short nod and keen gray eyes of a powerfully built man seated at a large, flat-topped desk in the center of the room. Six of the miners knew him well. He was Macdonald.

John Truscott rose from a chair beside the financier and greeted the Dry Gulchers with an encouraging smile. Macdonald remained motionless.

The six pioneers had time only to note that Macdonald's impassive features had been scored with new lines and his hair grayed heavily. Then they were ranged, like schoolboys, on a double row of chairs at the far side of the room.

Every man of the six seethed at what appeared a studied humiliation. Yet, strangely, they could make no articulate protest. The spell of the old Macdonald—whose command they had obeyed without question—gripped them against their will. They quivered as the cold, even tones of Macdonald's deep, authoritative voice shattered the tense silence:

"So Mr. Truscott intimated that you might hope for a little something from the Western Mining Development Company after surrendering your claims, did he? Well, I am practically that company."

He made deliberate pause—then, with cool, impersonal detachment:

"I candidly do not know what advantage money would be to a pack of fools who have been easy-marks all their lives."

Jack Rogers—who in time past would have died for Macdonald—snarled and reached like a flash for his concealed gun. "Easy, lad, easy!" cautioned Mandy Swatt, quick to forestall the crazed young miner's desperate intention. Disregarding the scuffle, Macdonald continued implacably:

"Gold—an untold fortune—right in your fists. A chance to use your brains and abilities! To serve some useful purpose in life. And you let it slip right through your fingers. Your existence dedicated to riffling bits of pasteboard and pouring alcohol

down your gullets. No wonder *anybody* could pick your pockets.

"Do you realize that the money you've staked and lost on a little ball spinning on a fool wheel has provided, for over three years, the capital for this banking institution and the financing of several industries? Even a child, burnt once, learns its lesson."

Macdonald's frigid, dispassionate utterance stung like a whip-lash—cut to the raw. The miners' eyes burned with hatred; lips twisted impotently; breaths came in convulsive gasps.

Truscott had turned toward the window. The tormentor went on:

"You probably accuse me of robbing you. Well, why shouldn't I have it before the other fellow? *You* couldn't have kept it?

"Suppose I did deliberately build the B. Burns with the intention of taking your money? Suppose I did establish Dugan to keep you contented with toys and trifles during the operation?"

Foley Dugan, their *pal*—a creature of Pluto Macdonald! The Dry Gulchers stared in a daze until comprehension finally thrust wickedly and deep into their hearts.

"No; you scarcely could be expected to see through that little trick of mine, or a freeze-out by my development company, when you were so simple-minded as to drop all your money at roulette, week after week—regularly as clockwork—and never even make *sure* whether or not the wheel was crooked."

Human endurance had reached its breaking-point. With wild, incoherent cries of rage the miners leaped to their feet. They got no farther. Rising suddenly, Macdonald leaned forward and hurled at them in clear, blasting tones:

"You call yourselves men—you who must have a nurse to see that you stow your pennies in your little bank!"

"Thank your lucky stars *some one* took an interest in you. Or to-day you'd be without a cent—instead of being the wealthiest men in San Francisco!"

The miners sank back stiffly into their chairs, and, eyes popping out at Macdonald and mouths agape, sat as inflexible, as immovable as a grove in the petrified forest.

Macdonald, too, resumed his seat. Yet it was not *Pluto* Macdonald the six pioneers beheld. A transformation had taken place. Tom Macdonald sat before them—the old Macdonald of the shrewd yet kindly eye and the dry, whimsical smile.

VIII.

PIVOTING his chair, Macdonald gazed absently out the tall, sunlit window. His voice, now warm and human and sympathetic, slipped into reminiscence:

"About four years ago seven men went prospecting into Lost Valley. Some people called it dam-fool recklessness. But I guess it would have been just plain suicide for all seven if I hadn't had the pick of the grittiest and squarest men on the coast. They were the professor, Mandy Swatt, Tim Betts, the Doc, Mose Tuttle, and a young fire-eater named Jack Rogers—in years the 'baby' of the party, but as game as men come."

"Folks declared it couldn't be done. Men who claimed to know, said that the sun focused through a burning-glass on this God-forsaken waste; that it dried up the blood in your veins, sucked the marrow from your bones, and left your scorched skeleton for the dust whirls to play with and the sandstorms to cover up. They were pretty nearly right."

"But there was one thing the accursed desert couldn't conquer—the *nerve* of my six pardners. That pulled us through Lost Valley and dragged us out of Death Valley—men more dead than alive."

"If ever men deserved to handle and hold the treasure we discovered at Dry Gulch, those men did. However, we all have our little failings. And my pardners never had been able to steer clear of gambling."

"I soon saw how it would end. One by one they would recklessly quit their claims, wander from Dry Gulch with their 'pile,' and gamble away their fortune to the last cent. I always would have enough for everybody; but I knew they would be too bold-headed to accept what they would call 'charity.'

"The only alternative I could think of was to save their money *for* them."

"So I planned the B. Burns—actually as a branch of this bank. The B. Burns, indeed, was so important, a part of our financial scheme here that a man had to be bartender—and receiving teller—at the B. Burns before he could become receiving teller here. And a man had to prove his executive ability as manager of the B. Burns in order to win an important executive position in this bank.

"It really was splendid training, for the 'First National Bank of Faro'—that's what the boys jokingly called it—always did a rushing business. The ability to mix even a cocktail or to act as banker or croupier in the casino didn't hurt them. They all are teetotalers, and don't gamble.

"The depositors at the B. Burns 'bank' of course were my six pardners and the men they took into Dry Gulch—who naturally became my pardners also. The accounts were handled according to the method I shall describe:

"The bartender initialed each bar check with the name of the purchaser, and kept accurate record of his total monthly purchases. In the casino it unfortunately was impossible to record the original deposit that each man brought into the place, because the money changed hands so often during the evening. So it had to be assumed that the patrons each made total monthly deposits there of an equal sum.

"At the end of the month all moneys received by the B. Burns bank were computed. From this total amount I deducted—and placed to my personal credit—interest on my investment in the B. Burns, and a reasonable profit on the bar sales. Deduction also was made of sums spent in overhead and operating costs.

"The residue might be called Dry Gulch's gross investment. This was apportioned into equal shares. From each man's share was deducted the sum total of his bar purchases. The amount remaining was recorded as his monthly deposit, and so entered on the books here in San Francisco.

"All money thus deposited I have invested in worthy securities and enterprises, and have credited each depositor with a just interest. The aggregate of these de-

posits, with interest compounded, now represents for each man what might well be regarded a staggering fortune."

Macdonald's eyes lost their momentary twinkle, and he passed his hand wearily across his forehead as though to brush away unpleasant memories. The men of Dry Gulch still sat spellbound.

"It has not always been easy for me," he said simply. "My old pardners were in Dry Gulch—men who had stood by me through thick and thin. I might say that I was very, very fond of them. And I wanted to see them. A good many times during the past years I have been tempted to go to Dry Gulch and square myself and give the whole thing away.

"But I felt that my pardners must *learn their lesson* before my plan could do them any permanent good.

"I believe the Western Mining Development deal has served that purpose. My friend Truscott helped me put it through. Although my original idea was to have these mining interests represented in stock held by the men of Dry Gulch and myself—share and share alike—I feel that John Truscott also deserves a share. These shares promise to be of extraordinary value before the mine peters out.

"Finally, my plan is to act as trustee for the men of Dry Gulch; holding their money in trust until each man is established in some congenial vocation.

"These great fortunes bring a responsibility which I feel that every man will accept. There's not one among you without the brains to put this money to proper use.

"The professor's text-books on biology still are used in half a dozen universities. Doc was one of the most promising young physicians in Baltimore before he hit the toboggan. Mandy knows cattle from A to Z; Tuttle is at home in manufacturing—you've *all* got buried talents ready to dig up and employ. I've faith in every one of you."

Swinging slowly to front the miners, Macdonald searched their faces long and earnestly and hungrily.

"Boys," he appealed softly, "maybe I've been just a cussed meddler in your lives. Perhaps it is I who am in need of a

cruelly severe lesson. But I want you to believe that I meant it for the best. And, if you can, I'd like you to forgive me for the suffering I've caused you."

Blinking uncertainly, and stirring with the utmost caution, as though fearful of waking from an impossibly splendid dream, the dazed Dry Gulchers felt—rather than saw—some one rise from a chair. It was the professor.

Shamelessly mopping his eyes with a bandanna kerchief, he stumbled toward the desk and clutched in a mighty grasp the hand swiftly outstretched to meet his.

"Tom Macdonald—Tom Macdonald"—he choked—"ye're white—clean white—all through.

"You've no right to take the hand of a cur who's done nothing but slander ye. But, just the same, praise God, it means more to me than anything else in the world—Tom Macdonald, old friend."

Wheteupon Dry Gulch found its feet—and voice.

"Three rip-roaring cheers for Tom Macdonald!" yelled the Doc as he led the wild rush that engulfed the bank president.

"Good old Mac! Good old Mac! Good old Mac!" The cheers rose in a tumult of sound that rang and echoed through every hall and corridor.

Visitors to this eminently respectable institution were mystified and shocked at this extraordinary, rude outburst.

But Jenks and Curry—and many others of the bank—chuckled aloud, slapped their thighs in a most undignified manner, and donnend a grin that would not come off. They knew.

Mr. Betts had warmed to his tale, and proceeded smoothly enough until the action would thrust him into the lime-light. Then he would empty his glass, or refill it, absently skip a chapter and go on glibly with the next, leaving me to pick up many loose threads. My curiosity was unsatisfied on many points. Some of these I questioned him about.

"How did Macdonald's plan eventually turn out?" I impertinently wanted to know.

"We couldn't act like quitters after what Macdonald had done for us, could we?" he

responded in gentle amazement. "We all became reliable, responsible citizens—I guess with no more vices than average humans.

"Macdonald soon turned over all our money to us. The professor has a chair in an Eastern university here, and spends a lot of time and money outfitting scientific expeditions that go all over the world. The Doc is active head of his own foundation for medical research—a wizard they say he is now. Mandy Swatt and Curley Q. are partners and cattle kings. Mose Tuttle is a big manufacturer—mixes in politics, too, I've heard. Everybody seems to be doing nicely.

"I've a good-sized lumber business—keep outdoors, away from the office, as much as I can. Doing a few stunts in shipbuilding on the Pacific Coast, too. Just been to Washington about it."

"The First National Bank of Faro seems to have done a great deal for the men of Dry Gulch. What, may I ask, has it done for Macdonald?" I queried finally.

Mr. Betts shook his head dismally. "A mighty poor investment for Macdonald, I'm afraid. He'd had no kith or kin of his own—an' he'd spent his energies lookin' after us. When this responsibility was over, he thought he'd sort of relax and take the vacation he needed.

"So he gave up active business for a while and turned his affairs over to a bright young chap he had confidence in—the first bad misjudgment he'd ever made of a man. The young feller panned out a born gambler—took all kinds of raw chances. Macdonald's eggs were in a good many baskets. He'd enjoyed being interested in lots of enterprises—a sort of outlet for his tremendous energies, I s'pose. And this young feller started to spill one basket after another. Macdonald had been taken down sick, and had to keep to his bed for a time.

"Before Mac could get up and about, an' find out what was goin' on, he was pretty nigh cleaned out. Then bad luck kept followin' him up. The last smash—just a short time ago—left him practically bankrupt. Limp Brooks heard of it first, and rushed in to tide the old man over. Then Limp wrote the professor in full."

He diffidently drew a telegram from his pocket and smoothed it out carefully. "Yuh might be int'rested in this. The professor sent one to every Dry Gulcher soon as he got Limpy's letter."

The telegram had been despatched from Boston, and read:

Dry Gulchers meet San Francisco, twentieth next month. Pluto unfortunate. Come prepared transfer all assets to Pluto trustee.

PROFESSOR.

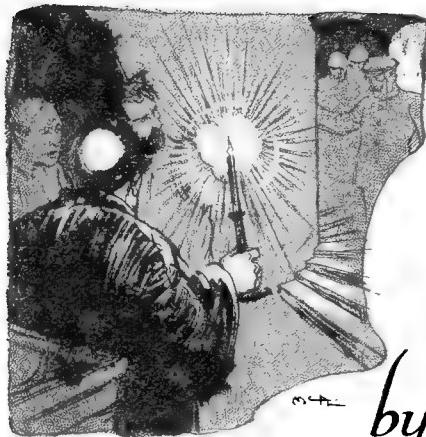
Challenged by my look of bold inquiry, Mr. Betts explained in some confusion:

(The End.)

"You see, once Macdonald is trustee in charge of all our money again, it 'll give 'im something to think about — an' he'll soon be his old self again. Anyway, it never was *our* money, whatever he might say. Right's right!"

I laughed mockingly.

"Jack Rogers took the first boat from France," said Mr. Betts irrelevantly, his embarrassed eyes avoiding mine, "an' I'm just waitin' here to go West with 'im, if he gets safe through them blooming submarines."



The Miracle

by John D. Swain

FOR hours we had ridden across desolate Champagne, our horses picking their way over the pockmarked terrane, littered with the incredible débris of a race of degenerates possessing the strength of men coupled with the wanton destructiveness of children.

The heat of afternoon gave way to the cool breath of evening; the sun set in a fantastic smear of crimson and gold, and the more brilliant stars crept forth from a dome of *lapis lazuli*. Presently the moon, at the full, rose in almost artificial splendor. Back home they were speaking of it as the "harvest moon." Here the only harvest was that of death, desolation, and despair.

Seen beneath its amber light the picture changed from a landscape in brilliant oils to an etching in monstrous blacks and whites. It was as if we were crossing the ghostly contour of some dead planet. The battle line, stilled by the armistice, was

well beyond—the returning tide of scattered inhabitants far to the rear. We were alone in a land at once empty and silent.

Here and there an object caught my eye, and I guided my mount aside to identify it. Once it was the sparkle of moonshine from the staring eyes of a doll. Again, it was a crucifix, the wooden figure hacked and defiled. A broken iron pot lay beside a fifteenth-century missal, painfully transcribed and illuminated by some forgotten monk during slow creeping years. A torn placard affixed to a wall announced a boche beer-drinking contest. Beside it was the impaled body of a kitten—a mere scrap of moldering fur.

Oftener there was nothing identifiable: houses had been wrecked and leveled, and then seemingly brayed in giant mortars, that there might remain nothing save dust, to be blown away by the wind and worked up into mud by the rain—to disappear

utterly from the face of the earth and the very memories of men.

We rode in silence for the most part, Lieutenant Paradis and I, depressed by the bleak and artificial desert created by man in one of the garden spots of Europe.

It was then a weird and startling sight which suddenly materialized before our eyes from the fog-wraiths which clung to a winding river—nothing less than a perfectly preserved little town in the midst of all the woful wreckage.

Not absolutely untouched, of course; looking sharp, one observed where a corner of the church belfry had gone, and here and there a gaping hole where a home had stood, but practically intact, even the stained-glass in the church and most of the humble panes of its shops unbroken.

Here it stood, as if left for a solitary specimen of the vanished villages of Champagne.

If any such purpose had spared it one could have wished that some other town might have been chosen in its place—for Breaux was unknown to the tourist, it possessed no famous edifice, no supreme example of medieval craftsmanship.

Still, marvelously sweet, it looked sleeping amid its filmy draperies of vapor, beneath the full moon, with its one principal street widening to a civic center where stood the church, the two inns, the town hall, and on whose cobbled pave had for centuries raged no battle fiercer than that of its bare-headed, wooden-shod market women over the prices of fat geese and luscious grapes.

It was silent and deserted as our tired horses clumped through it; I noted especially a little wine-shop, with the symbolic dry bush still in its place over the door, its square bottles still in orderly array upon the shelf behind the copper counter.

That the boches should have spared the church and the tavern answered all queries as to the condition of the other buildings. Breaux had been spared. But *why*?

We passed abruptly from it to open country, as one does in France, with no tailing off, such as our suburbs reveal. The town ended as if cut off with a giant's knife. A little way beyond I turned in my saddle for a parting glance.

Breaux stood between us and the moon now; and, its nearly horizontal beams striking through the windows and portals, it was as if the entire village was ablaze for some silent and ghostly festival, some voiceless triumph.

Lieutenant Paradis answered the question in my eyes, speaking for the first time in hours.

"It is the town which was saved by miracle," he said. "By the Colonel Eugen Etienne Ste. Marie de Voulx, late of Napoleon's Young Guard, who rose from the dead to preserve the home of his ancestors."

"A miracle?" I responded vaguely. "Ah—yes, like the Angel of Mons and the Christ seen at night upon the battle-fields easing the souls of dying men!"

For some moments Paradis did not speak; and when he did it was not to refer at once and directly to the miracle of Breaux.

"Concerning these things who knows? Not I! I neither believe nor disbelieve. But always, in world crises, these reports are current. It was so when Greeks fought Trojans. And do you recall that when the Turks took Constantinople the wretched people sought refuge in their cathedral, and as the enemy burst in upon them there and began slaughtering young and old, women and children, the priest, who was in the midst of celebrating mass, bore the sacred elements out through a little door in the apse; and the Turks sealed it up, and so it has remained unto this day in the mosque of Ste. Sophia.

"And it is said that on the day when it shall be reconsecrated as a Christian church the little door shall open and the celebrant come forth and resume the canon of the mass, at the point where it was so bloodily interrupted centuries ago."

We crossed the brook by a ford since its bridge had been blown up, and as we clambered up the bank Paradis continued:

"So, in our own war men say that on a certain night when a gap was torn in our lines, a ragged hole open to Calais, and there were no more troops to throw in, there rose silently from the mists strange men in great bearskin shakos, wearing obsolete bandoliers, and carrying clumsy muskets.

"At their head, upon a gray horse, rode a gray figure, bowed forward in thought, one hand thrust into his breast, a cocked hat upon his head. It was, to be sure, the Little Corporal, risen from the dead to hurl his grizzled Old Guard upon the desecrators of French soil.

"At any rate, the gap was stopped, nobody knows how or by whom. A division rushed up by lorries found no one, friend or foe, when they arrived at dawn—only the waves of dead men as the tide had ebbed and flowed. Myself? I believe that when mankind is in travail, an anguish too great to be borne alone, it flies to Deity as a child to its mother's skirt, or as chicks to the maternal wing.

"It is inconceivable, intolerable, that God should look down a mere spectator upon their agony as from a celestial grandstand. And so there are portents in the sky, and gods fighting with men, and legends passing from one to another the children of hope and fear."

"Merely legends?" I asked.

Lieutenant Paradis shrugged.

"Who can say? Let me repeat what a great philosopher has written: That with so many hundreds of thousands of lusty young souls cut off instantly and in the full sway of the most violent passions, it is inconceivable that they should at once go to their abiding place; rather must the earth be girdled by a stratum of spiritual unrest, reacting upon our minds in many singular and mysterious ways."

Under the waning stars, and to the solemn accompaniment of the slow-coming dawn, Paradis related to me the miracle whereby De Voulx, though long asleep in his coffin, returned to save the village of his forebears from the slime of the green-gray German hordes.

Three men sat about a little table in the sacristy of the old parish church of St. Leu in Breaux. It was early fall, the third year of the great war; and save for these three there remained no living inhabitant in the town. All had departed, bearing with them such valuables as could be gathered up before the German onrush.

For days the unfortunates from scores

of similar villages to the eastward had streamed through Breaux, pausing long enough to rest for an hour and to whisper of the unspeakable wo that had overtaken their homes.

Breaux was an ancient town, but one never looming large in the pages of history. Its one seigniorial family, that of De Voulx, had produced no scions of the first rank. They had been provincial lordlings, stepping high upon the cobbled streets of the town dominated by their rambling château, but seeming ill at ease whenever they, on rare occasions, journeyed to Versailles.

By and large they had dealt wisely and kindly with their tenants and retainers. One of them had saved the town from sack during the Spanish wars. Tradition had it that the very earliest of the name had beaten back the marauding bands of Teutons.

The last of his line, Colonel Eugen, one-time commander of Napoleon's Young Guard, seems to have been a pompous, fussy little man, of no particular ability but unquestioned courage. He was considered to bear some slight resemblance to the great commander himself: a likeness he did nothing to minimize by his dress, carriage, and demeanor.

He died in Breaux upon returning from the siege of Acre; and, in his last delirium, had risen in his bed and remarked in his most characteristic manner that if ever Breaux were in danger of capture they had but to open his sepulchre and he would come forth and save the town, even as the De Voulx overlords had ever preserved it inviolate.

Whereupon he fittingly died without spoiling his utterance by an anticlimax; and he lay in a leaden coffin in the vault of St. Leu, beneath the feet of the three solitary citizens of Breaux, who were, in fact, discussing him in the sacristy lighted by a pair of great altar candles.

The *curé*, Father Jean, had remained to secure the jeweled ciborium containing the consecrated host and the parish register, together with such portable relics as he could save. Across from him sat M. Pelletier, a heavy, red-faced man with beard cut square like a spade, and who, as mayor,

had busied himself securing certain of the town records.

The third was of peasant type, with a face cross-hatched with innumerable lines indicative of honesty, shrewdness, and obstinacy in equal proportions.

It was he, the grandson of the orderly of the late Colonel de Voulx, who was addressing the other two, the big men of his little world, whom he sought to coerce with his dogged persistence; accompanied by many shrugs, outbursts of palms, elevating of brows, and clicks of his tongue against the roof of his toothless mouth.

"It is I who tell you, *mon père*, and you, *monsieur le maire*, I who had the story from my grandsire (whom the blessed saints have in their keeping!), and after him, from my father, also a pious Christian. It has been kept in our family as a sacred trust. *Pardieu!* For just such an occasion as this, *messieurs!* For, as he lay dying, his soul already straining at the halter, if you will permit the saying, *mon père*—"

The aged priest raised his hand. Both he and Pelletier, and indeed every one in Breaux, down to the gamins who played about its one street, knew the story by heart.

"The minds of dying men wander in blind paths, my son! If I were to consider all the pitiful last words to which I have listened here in our parish during the last half century—"

The old man interrupted him impatiently.

"Of a surety! My own blessed father called for his pipe—and he had not used tobacco for twenty years. But one is to distinguish between the babbling of a simple peasant and the inspired prophecy of a great one like a De Voulx, whose ancestors have preserved this our town since history was written!"

Father Jean smiled faintly.

"Pierre, my son, it is not meet that we should violate the grave of one given sepulture according to the rites of the church, merely to disprove an old wives' tale."

Pierre fairly sputtered with indignation; and ere he could find his tongue again the third man, the Mayor Pelletier, opened his firm lips for the first time.

"You know, begging your pardon, *monsieur le curé*, for whom I have only love and respect, and you, friend Pierre, that I am an atheist. Religion harms no one—and doubtless consoles old women. As for me, when I die you may serve me as you will. I am dead for all time—as dead as my faithful old dog Bidou, and less worthy of immortality!"

"No more than I believe in Father Jean's rites do I credit good Pierre's miracles. We do wrong to waste time here. We are custodians of town property. At any moment the Huns may clatter down our street. I haven't the least superstitious fear against opening our eminent townsman's leaden casket—but I see no sense in taking time to do so!"

Pierre waved his knotted hands frantically.

"*Name of a name of God!* You don't see, and you don't believe, and you this and that! How could Colonel de Voulx, with his last breath, bid us commit a sacrilege upon himself, and he a good Christian, shriven by the pious Père Hyacinthe, your predecessor, my father? And you, *monsieur*, why waste in empty words time enough to open his coffin twice over? See!"

Pierre drew from his blouse a keen adz and brandished it.

"It is made sharp for biting into the lead! If indeed Colonel de Voulx spoke idly, no harm can come of it; do not the thrice accursed boches open every sealed coffin of the blessed dead, seeking for jewels? And think you they will spare this one?"

Father Jean glanced half-humorously, half-sadly into the steady eyes of Pelletier and shrugged helplessly. The latter spoke.

"There are no miracles. There never were! But there are always *facts*; and one of them is this: the German cavalry will snap us up like trout while we argue here, and with us the records, and that jeweled gewgaw you value so highly, Père Jean!"

Pierre rallied for his final argument. He controlled his excitement with a violent effort.

"Listen, then! It is true that you have heard my story many times. It is true that every breeched lad in Breaux knows

it by heart. And I, Pierre, tell you they also *believe* it! And when they shall return, some day, and, fumbling amid the ashes and broken glass, shall seek to trace that place where once burned their hearth fires, think you they shall not say: 'If only Père Jean, and that donkey of a Pelletier, and old doddering Pierre had but summoned forth Colonel de Voulx from his tomb, Breaux would have been saved!'"

He leaned back, the breath whistling between his grinning lips, his shrewd, puckered old eyes, bright and black still, triumphantly seeking theirs.

Abruptly the priest rose, taking one of the candles in his hand.

"Come!" he said. "The thing shall be done, that my poor people may know that our thought was for them and their fire-sides, even if that thought be impious, which the good God forbid!"

Pelletier said no more, but, accompanied by Pierre bearing his adz, followed the priest through a little door, down a narrow stone stair, into the crypt of the old church beneath the altar.

Here slept the few notables of Breaux: a long line of De Voulxs, the departed incumbents of the parish of St. Leu, a locally famous *avocat*, half a dozen others deemed worthy of internment here. Conspicuous among them, the great casket of Colonel Eugen Etienne Ste. Marie de Voulx, the soft lead deep bitten by a die of the Napoleonic bee, many times repeated, and one terse line beneath his name: "Of the Young Guard."

The place was cool and dry, and the home of many shadows, pursued hither and thither as the great candle held by Père Jean moved in his nervous grasp.

Wasting no time, for there was none to be wasted, old Pierre swung his keen adz surely, and it sank into the lead casing. Matching each succeeding cut with the skill of a forester, he proceeded entirely around the casket, and in a surprisingly short time motioned to the others that he had finished the first part of his task—whereupon they jointly and with difficulty eased the heavy lid to the floor. Underneath was discovered a perfectly sound oak coffin.

From this, too, but without removing it from the outer casing, Pierre pried off the top—and behold! Before them lay the late colonel of the Young Guard in a surprisingly good state of preservation, although his face was swollen and nearly black. Still, one might trace a hint of the likeness to the great Napoleon, so sedulously cultivated by the old soldier.

He was dressed in full uniform: blue, swallow-tailed coat with broad revers and tarnished brass buttons and epaulets, gloved hands crossed over his sheathed sword, cocked hat by his side, long-spurred cavalry boots upon his bandy legs. A row of medals was strung across his breast.

The three men stared at him in breathless silence. The *cure* and Pierre crossed themselves; Pelletier gravely touched his forehead in respectful salute. Whatever their various ideas, in one particular they felt alike. Here before them, visible to the naked eye, lay one of the officers of a famous and unbeaten regiment of the great military genius of their beloved country.

So absorbed were they, Pierre with his hopes, Father Jean with his apprehensions, the mayor with his respectful interest, that they failed to hear upon the cobbled street above them the faint clatter of the advance force of Uhlans, riding cautiously into Breaux; failed to hear them as, having dismounted, they followed the tiny candle gleam down into the crypt, and were shocked into a numb terror only when the captain of Uhlans, in excellent French, addressed them mockingly as he advanced through the stairway door.

"So! It is that Frenchmen rifle the graves of their own dead, that they may afterward cry out upon the German ghouls! The good pastor, too!"

His teeth showing in a wolfish smile, his monocle fixed, one hand at the automatic in his belt, the officer advanced within the circle of light, followed by several of his staff, and, craning forward, gazed upon that which had so riveted the attention of the three Frenchmen.

"You are wrong, my son," Père Jean replied with dignity. "There are no valuables in these, our poor tombs, save the honored dead they hold!"

The Uhlans stared insolently upon him.

"Perhaps you will then explain the trouble to which you put yourself in opening this casket?"

"I will do so," Père Jean responded with a quiet nobility of demeanor. "Tradition in our little town has it that this son of the Church and of France, and one-time officer of the great Napoleon, would, if brought from his sepulcher, save Breaux in its day of need from impious hands, even as his ancestors did in ancient times."

The officer laughed harshly.

"And your theology swallows these childrens' fairy tales, worthy pastor?"

The mayor, Pelletier, answered him.

"Neither he nor I, but this descendant of De Voulx's orderly. To humor a good and faithful citizen we assented. That is all."

The German rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Well, well! And why not? Let us see if there be any truth in it. Come forth, my Gallic Lazarus! Save thy ugly hamlet of Breaux! Many prettier towns have gone up in smoke this past week."

Then began a scene such as no other war but this could match. The Uhlans' Teutonic sense of humor rose to the surface. After an orgy of blood and rapine the surfeited beast chose to be good-naturedly facetious for the moment.

Obeying a curt command, two big cavalrymen laid hold upon De Voulx, and twitched him from the wooden bed where he had slept so long. They held him erect, clapped his cocked hat upon his head; then, their captain catching the travesty of the emperor in the bloated features, he bent one arm—the brittle bone cracking sharply—and thrust the hand within his breast. His sword was buckled on; the officer saluted him mockingly, hailed him as "*kamerad!*" and, entering into the spirit of the occasion, the gruesome figure was pushed and pulled about, complimented upon his winning so many medals as colonel of so distinguished a regiment, and then kicked and buffeted for failing to reply to the queries or to return the salutes.

It was to be noted that throughout the incredible buffoonery the little figure of De Voulx seemed to maintain an unshaken dignity which no insult could degrade.

Dead this century and more, the deathless panoply of birth and character never for an instant failed to make cheap and bestial his living mockers!

Meanwhile Père Jean had been twitching at the sleeves of his two companions, and step by stealthy step, moving backward toward the little door, they slipped up the crooked stairs, and through the sacristy, and out into the black night, sick at heart, and with the uncouth shouts of the Uhlans sounding fainter and fainter in their horrified ears.

This was the story that Lieutenant Paradis told me as we rode away from Breaux; and at this point we reined up for a final back-flung look at it.

The moon was riding high in the heavens now; and beneath its rays the little town seemed a fragile toy, fabricated of beaten silver.

"Yet you have not told me," I complained, "what really saved Breaux?"

"Colonel Eugen Etienne Ste. Marie de Voulx saved it!" replied my guide.

"But—but how—"

He turned and looked me in the eye.

"A *miracle*, so they are already saying. So say I—for of such stuff are dreams and miracles made! De Voulx, as has been learned by painstaking investigation of contemporary records, died of the black death, the germs of which he brought home with him from Asia. His orderly, who had served long in the East, recognized the symptoms, and warned the physician who attended De Voulx and the priest who shrived him.

"He was able to prevent them from contracting the plague, and it was by his advice that the body was hermetically sealed in lead and the secret kept from the village.

"When the casket was opened the germs were still virulent, still lying in wait. None of the three Frenchmen touched the body; but the Uhlans, who did, contracted the black death by contagion; and when the German Medical Staff learned the truth, and had cremated their numerous victims, they drew a circle about Breaux, forbidding, under severest penalties, any crossing of the dead line. And as this order was not countermanded, De Voulx kept his promise, and Breaux stands inviolate to-day!"

The Hammer

by John Frederick

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE VERDICT.

BUT a moment later, when the door opened and the fat stranger appeared, the last vestige of dignity dropped from the square shoulders of Peter. He sprang to his feet and fairly ran upon the stranger, crying: "Salviati!" His teacher caught him in two pudgy arms.

"Pietro! Pietro! Pietro! I have ached to see you as the foot of a bare-legged friar who has trodden twoscore miles aches for the touch of warm water. Pietro, I have learned all! I have learned how you kneeled before the Holy Father and named my trouble when you might have asked a thousand ducats for yourself. Noble Pietro!"

"Tush, Salviati—you are fat, and grown foolish likewise. Sit down. Eat, drink, and tell me what is in your heart."

"Italy is in my heart, dear boy. Italy—white, beautiful Italy! And you, Pietro?"

"I am well."

"Well! Do you call it so? No, you are famous, Pietro. I asked of a fat pedler the way to the house of one Messer Peter Warburton. He looked me over with a grin from head to foot—as I am, dusty as you see! 'Perhaps, also,' said the rascal, 'you would like to know the way to the Vatican?' By my heart, I laughed aloud, I was so rejoiced to find you known even to the beggars in the streets.

"I told him I was a friend of yours. Off came his hat as if I had tossed him a coin, and he must needs take me a half-mile on the way and chatter all the time of the great master. Ha, ha, ha! To think that

I am a poor hen, and yet I have had the warmth of heart to hatch an eagle!"

Peter sat with a smile listening, nodding, remembering.

"But the statue—and of Beatrice della Marca!" said Salviati at last, when he had poured forth a whole ocean of words.

"We shall go there—at once. My hat, my coat, lad."

"And what of Beatrice, Pietro? You blush? Ha? Well, well! Let us go to see this statue!"

With a great anxiety Peter, followed by two of his servants to hold lights, opened the door to his workshop a few minutes later. As a sculptor his opinion of Salviati had fallen much since he had come to Rome and seen the designs of the great masters; but as a critic he knew the Florentine was a man to be respected—even dreaded.

Simple as his nature was, he knew that most of the praise he had hitherto received came from men who wished to praise rather to find fault, but the honesty of Salviati was far, far above suspicion.

Therefore, when the little man first tossed his hands up and then clasped them together, while he stood in mute admiration before the Venus, Peter's heart bounded like a horse under the spur. He stepped closer to hear Salviati's murmurs of delight.

"Yes, yes," he said, "when I left England, I thought to find you a great hawk, but I find that my hawk has killed the eagle in the blue of the sky and flown up higher, higher! You shall pass beyond my ken in another year! But where is the whole design? Where is the model? For without the head a statue is like a face without eyes."

Peter unveiled the model confidently and stood back with an expectant smile. It was to be the same story, then: praise and sweet words that warm the blood and tilt back the head! His smile gradually faded and then changed to an expression of anxiety, for the delight was gone from the face of Salviati. He seemed to hesitate, and he glanced once or twice toward Peter.

"Speak, speak, Lionardo," said Peter at last. "I am burning with trouble to see you so silent!"

"May I say the words that are in my heart?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Then if I were here alone, I should throw the veil over that model and sit down to weep!"

Peter strove to smile—to speak. He had to moisten his lips before he could say a word.

"What is wrong, Salviati? Is it the chin? Yes, I know that is not strong and sure, but I shall remedy that in the marble, never doubt."

"No, it is not the chin; the chin is very well."

"The poise of the head, then?"

"No, that also is very well."

"Then in God's name, what is wrong?"

The little man threw out his hands in despair.

"Is this not the goddess of love?"

"Yes, yes, Venus."

"Then the goddess of love is a harlot!"

"Unsay that, Lionardo, for the model of this is a beautiful and good woman."

"Pietro—ah, that is it! She is too beautiful to be good!"

"Come, you quarrel with words. Speak out your heart."

"Not to this thing which you call the Venus."

"Salviati, you anger me. I say the lady is good."

"Who told you that?"

"My heart, which beats when I see her, yes, when I think of her!"

"Peter, Venus should be loved by the whole world, but only one man could love this woman!"

"Do not riddle with words!"

"You grind your teeth, Peter. Alas, it

is no easy thing for me to dispraise! I came here as ready to see beauty as a closed flower is to receive the warmth of the sun."

"And now—"

"I shall say no more. It is lovely as it stands. Thousands shall praise it and wonder at it."

"But?"

"But it shall die before the marble crumbles. It shall not live in the minds of men longer than its original in the flesh!"

Peter moved a hand across his forehead.

"Why did you leave the face till the last?

That should have been the first to take form if Beatrice is truly the image that lies somewhere in the heart of the artist as the goddess of love. No, Peter, you have left it till the last. A single day's work would make it complete, but you have left it only blocked out, as if you would fain leave it to your imaginings before the pitiless chisel has marked it with one likeness forever!"

"I have indeed delayed the carving of that," said Peter heavily, "but only because I fear that I can never reproduce the perfect beauty of her face!"

"It is not that. You lie even to yourself, and those are the most deadly lies. They are written in a man's heart like black ink on white paper. My friend, my dear Pietro, I find no fault with the features of her face, but with the soul that should brood behind them. There is no soul, but only a thing of smiles and flesh which reflects the sun like a mirror. Shall this be the goddess of love—and from your hand? No, no, Peter. For the conception is right! Where got you that posture?"

Peter searched through his mind. For the first time he remembered that the posture was never one of Beatrice's, but of some other woman he had seen. He forgot whom.

"I do not know," he answered.

"At least not from her," said Salviati, "but I tell you this from my heart, Pietro, if you would have your statue live, go back to the Lady Beatrice and try again to find a soul under her smiles."

"Salviati," said Peter grimly, "you have given me a thousand wounds. If you were

another man, I would—but no, I shall not talk of anger, for you have been frank. In my own heart, I do not know whether or not you are right or wrong. But I am going this moment to learn the truth. I must go to the house of Beatrice."

"Wait but a little time, Pietro, for in this mood you will either stab her to the heart or take her in your arms—and either way there is ruin!"

"Yet I will go. Return to my house. Hither, lad, and see that my friend Messer Salviati is well cared for—with the best that is in my house. So, farewell till the morning, Lionardo!"

He strode away, and the little Florentine made a few steps after him, calling out. When he met with no response, except the waving of the fur on Peter's coat, he turned about and resigned himself to the conduct of Peter's servants.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SONG OF SONGS.

THE Englishman went on with lowered head. The words of Salviati beat into his ear with every stride and broke up his thoughts. In this confusion he stood at last in a room of Della Marca's house and waited for the coming of Beatrice. He went before a casement and looked from it without seeing the moonlit street below him, thick with crowds who rejoiced in the warm, spring air.

"Pietro!" she called behind him. As he turned she stood dressed in clinging white, with her arm still lifted above her head as she paused aside the violet velvet tapestry. She had much affected simple white since the first day he sketched her. As she met him she dropped both her hands in his. Her head tilted back as she smiled.

"It is long since you have come to me, Pietro!"

"Two days."

"Three days—four days—a week!"

"No, only two days."

"How can you be so sure?"

"You see," he explained, "I have made me a rule never to come to see you oftener than every other day."

Her head turned quickly. Peter relinquished her hands. "You are laughing at me again, Beatrice!"

He touched her face and made her turn.

"It is well that you only smile. Sometimes you anger me when you laugh."

"I cannot help it—sometimes. You are very odd. No, no, I did not mean in that way, but your thoughts move on so—so ponderously, like the tread of a marching column, do you see—that I cannot help but laugh—sometimes."

She gave example immediately, for seeing the grave pondering in his face, she broke out into laughter. She checked it as soon as possible.

"Now you are very angry, Messer Pietro?"

"At least the sound is pleasant," he decided.

Anxiety and amusement were both in her smile.

"You are a careful critic," she said. "Therefore that is a mighty compliment."

He said: "When you blush like that I know you are happy. And then I wish that I were a painter so that I could copy the color. Let us sit over here."

"But why here? The bench is of hard, cold stone."

"Aye, but the moonlight shines here, and I must see you clearly."

During a long silence he held her with his glance relentlessly. Her eye wavered here and there uneasily, but was always drawn back to his face.

"I do not mind your stare," she said at last, "but why do you scowl so, Pietro?"

"Because I am trying to find something," he said.

She clapped her hands together with a little burst of passion.

"Are you a sculptured man? Is your flesh bloodless wood? Have you no feeling, Pietro?"

"It is pleasant to see you when you are angry, Beatrice."

She checked the next words even as they hung poised on her lips.

"You see, it sets a tint of yellow fire in your eyes," he explained.

"And you do not care why I am angry?"

"Shall I ask the wind why it blows?

"This is idle talk, is it not?" he continued. "And I have come here for a purpose to-night. Why do you flush again?"

"What is your purpose?"

"To study you. No, do not turn away."

He caught both her hands and made her sit facing him.

"I cannot tell whether to be angry, or to laugh or smile," she said faltering.

"By my faith, Beatrice, you seem nearer to weeping than to any of the other three."

Her hands tugged at his, but his grip held.

She said: "You have such a frown that I cannot see your eyes in the shadow. I am afraid! Let my hands free!"

"If I did that you would turn away," he answered. "Now you smile. That is well. You are no longer angry."

"Foolish Pietro, you have seen me many a time. Why do you look so scowlingly on me now?"

"Because I have come to study, not merely to admire. I have been troubled about the Venus, you see."

"Ah! But I have heard it praised from a thousand sources. They tell me it will be a masterpiece. Why will you not let me come to look at it?"

"Not until the head is done. Then you may see. It is the head which troubles me. I do not like the model."

"Then you find fault with me?"

He did not heed the hardness of her voice, but answered:

"I have wondered whether the fault was in me or in you. A friend told me to-night that the trouble lies in you."

"Ah! Who is this friend?"

"The yellow is in your eyes again, Beatrice. He is a dear comrade of mine. He taught me all I know."

"I would give many round ducats to see this fellow—this prodigy of wisdom. Where has he seen me? It was in the morning, Pietro, very early, and then sometimes there are shadows under my eyes and I look older than I am—because of the slanting light. I hate the morning!"

"No, he has never seen you."

"Then his tongue should be clipped for an insolent rogue!"

"Hush! He criticised your soul, and not

your face. I was troubled also, but I see now that the fault was mine, not thine."

"Tell me!"

"I have made a Venus that is flesh, and flesh wrinkles and grows old."

He fell musing, with downward eyes.

"Look up," she whispered, "for when you look down I know that your thoughts are far from me."

"No, I was thinking of you even then. Ah, Beatrice, in these white hands you hold my heart and play with it when I am with you. When I am away, there is a difference!"

"Why, why? If you stop there, I shall hate you, Pietro."

"I do not know, but when I am away, I think I forget. I only remember that you are beautiful."

"I would not ask for more than that!"

"Would you not?" he asked, wondering deeply.

"No, truly. What woman would ask for more?" she said.

"Why, Beatrice, I have known men in love to whom the thought of a woman was like a speaking voice."

"I hate soliloquies, Pietro. If you have thoughts of me, let me hear them. As for the others—"

She waved such idle things away into the thin air. Peter's eyes burned as they followed the flash of the white arm.

"I shall go to see Messer Antonio della Marca," he muttered softly, "on the morrow. I understand him at last!"

"What do you say, Pietro?"

"My friend Salviati is a fool! I shall tell him so!"

"And who is he?"

"Beatrice, you are beautiful!"

"You have said that." She smiled, and then leaned a little toward him. "But tell me again, and again, and again! You have never spoken before as you speak now."

Out of the noises of the street grew a girl's singing voice, faint with distance.

"Beatrice—"

He stopped, breathing with difficulty.

"It is always this way, Beatrice, when I sit close to you my pulses thicken and go fast, and you change, and I catch the fragrance of some violet perfume that is always

near you, and a madness grows into my blood."

She watched him with great eyes.

"Beatrice, you tremble!"

"And you also, Pietro!"

"You are dearer to me—dearer than the marble Venus!"

The singing girl was drawing closer. She sang in a strange language. The white arms of Beatrice rose. Her hands rested on the shoulders of Peter.

"Tell me more, Peter. Tell me more."

"Beatrice, when your lips are so close, and your arms, I forget all other things. Let Salviati be damned! I shall not strive to worship aught but this marvelous white body!"

The voice of the singing girl rose clearly from the street and thrilled about them.

The arms which locked her to him loosened. "Listen!" he whispered.

"I can hear nothing but your voice!"

"No, no! Listen again! The singing from the street!"

"I care not!"

"You shall care, for it is love! Come!"

"What is it, Pietro? I hear only a common ballad!"

"Ah, it is the song of songs!"

He led her quickly to the window, and they looked down. The singing girl, dressed brightly in short skirts and with a wreath of leaves about her head, walked slowly down the street, strumming a lute, and her head tilted as she sang. The moonlight fell on her red-gold hair.

"What is it, Pietro? You tremble again! Dear Pietro!"

"Listen! Ah, God! Beatrice, can you not understand?"

Under the casement she came, paused, her head raised with the ecstasy of a high, sweet note. A little crowd followed her, paused with her, and went on with her down the street.

Beatrice caught Peter by the arms as he turned from the window; but the passion was dead in his face, and his eyes stared past her an infinite distance into space. She could not tell how far, she could not follow his thought, as it fled many a hundred leagues past river and mountain and the blue sea.

She only knew that he had dropped far away from her in a single instant, and she connected the change with the leaf-crowned face of the singing girl who had paused beneath the window.

"Pietro!" she pleaded, and drew him closer. He pushed himself gently away, and still his eyes stared past her. She was desperate now. "Pietro! Turn back to me! What has happened?"

"Sonia!" he said, and rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE WILL OF THE HAMMER.

WHEN he reached the street Sonia and her following group had disappeared, but he thought that he heard the singing to the north. He ran a little distance in that direction up an alley and then came to a sudden halt, for now the song came faintly from the west. Even as he turned it died out.

He ran on at full speed, his coat flapping wildly about his shoulders until at the turning of a corner he ran into the midst of a group of the night watch. They stopped him and asked if he were pursued, but he wrenched himself away and fled on down the street.

Sometimes he thought he heard the music again, but always fainter. Perhaps it was in his own thoughts, for the phrases of the lyric ran in his brain. For an hour he searched here and there.

At last he came to a halt, panting and half exhausted, and realizing that he could never hope to find her in this wilderness of crooked streets. Nevertheless, if he could not find her, Sonia would find him, even as Salviati had done. Any beggar in the streets could direct her. Perhaps even while he talked with Beatrice she had been to his house and asked for him. He struck his hands together at the thought.

Then a great and unreasoning elation swept over him, and he walked on singing. It was the ballad he had heard on the lips of Sonia, but he did not know that. In fact, she had dropped from his mind; all thought of her and even Beatrice vanished

like wind-blown torches in the night, and there remained the Venus!

He knew now that he could unveil that hidden face, and a frenzy of eagerness filled him. He could not wait for the dawn, but went directly to his workshop to pace up and down with the sheeted models ghostlike about him. And still the thought of the Venus grew out upon him like a speaking voice, telling him more, more, more.

The day began with an uncertain gray. The white statue stole from the gloom, and as Peter stared at it he began to vision the face which held that passion. Before the day brightened his thought was clear. He picked up the chisel and then the hammer, that heavy hammer which was like another mind to him. He weighed it in his hand and then shook it above his head with a laugh of exultation. Still the day grew. It was bright, and the Venus glimmered.

His assistants came in a group. One of them, seeing his master stand with hammer and chisel before the statue, and in his richest dress, smiled askance to his companions and offered Peter a mantle before he started work. But Peter drove them from the shop, and bade them keep out all visitors that day. As they closed the doors behind them he raised his tools and attacked the head.

It seemed to him as if that head lay merely wrapped in outer layers of the white stone. His only duty was to free the captive and give her to the day. He worked with fury. The chips flew—the marble dust settled over his fine velvets. From the vigil and excitement of the night he was trembling—hot and cold, weak and strong alternately.

His assistants, outside the door, listened to the incessant beat of the hammer, and they heard the master sometimes mutter, sometimes cry out, sometimes break into a song. They looked at each other with significant eyes now and then.

"He is drunk!" they would say.

"Yes, drunk, but what shall we do?"

"No, he is not drunk, fools. It is the passion of his art which is on him!"

"But he was never like this before. Did you notice him when we came in this morning?"

"Yes, he looked as if he had seen something—or as if he had heard some tidings."

"Perhaps the Holy Father had doubled the price he was to pay, and the master is frantic with delight."

"But perhaps he is merely drunk."

"Yes, yes! What if he should spoil all the beautiful work he has done!"

"Then he would beat us fearfully to-morrow."

"Nay, fool, he would flee from Rome to-morrow if he spoiled his work to-day. It would cost a man's life to spoil that block of marble. His holiness, they say, has set his heart on it."

"Yes, and on the portrait of the Lady della Marca."

"How can he make it well when he works so fast? Yes, he is surely drunk!"

"Let us go to the Holy Father and tell him the master is mad!"

"Harken how the hammer beats! To wield it like that would weary me in ten minutes. And he has worked like this half the day."

"This shall be a very glad or a very sad day for us; if he spoils the statue we shall lose a good master."

"You chatter like girls. Messer Strochini himself has praised the work of Messer Peter. He wrote it in a letter to Maestro Pasquino, and what he said was told to me yesterday."

"It is past the time for the midday meal. Let us go in to him and ask if he will not eat."

"He would strike us with the hammer, and in his hands that would be death."

"Listen! It still beats without pause! He has ruled the hammer so long, now it seems as if the hammer were making him perform its will whether he would or no!"

"There's a thought too silly for a girl!"

"I understand him. He would kill us if we broke in upon him now. He is not mad, but his brain is on fire. So it is with a man like him. All this time he has worked upon the Venus, and his soul was smoldering. To-day some wild wind has raised the flame, and now it burns—it burns!"

So they chattered, while the hammer thudded remorselessly against the chisel. The day wore on. Still he worked without

ceasing. They heard him cursing. Then he broke off and sang a bit of a ballad. They clutched each other and fell a-whispering.

That evening gradually drew on. The light dimmed slightly.

"It is half dark!" they would say. "He cannot see to work! Yes, yes, this is madness! He is ruined, and the Venus must be spoiled!"

"I would give my hopes of heaven for one glance at that work he has done to-day. It must be a terrible or a beautiful thing."

The apprentices broke off their comments on their master to eye a girl dressed in much-worn clothes, with a lute pressed under her arm. She came directly toward them.

"Who is this singing girl who comes?" they asked each other.

"Look! her dress is dusty, and there is a crown of withered leaves on her hair."

"I have never seen such hair! The last of the sun shining through it makes it a fire."

She stood before them, her lute under her arm.

"Gentle sirs, I have been to the house of Messer Peter Warburton, and one told me that I should find him here."

"You may not go in. Are you a model? Come to-morrow. It would be worth my place to let you in to him now. There is a mood on him."

The hammering within ceased, the pause continued for the first time that day.

Hope, fear and sorrow were in her smile.

"Kind sirs, I have come many hundred leagues to see him."

"The hammer has stopped," said one of them. "Perhaps he will work no more in the half light. Yes, you may go in now, but be cautious. He is in his mood."

Shaking and blind with labor, Peter stepped back from the statue, the last of his inspiration worked out of him by that terrific day. The Venus was done, and in the relaxation of that knowledge his head swam and a mist rose in his eyes so that he could not see his work.

At the opening of the door behind he turned with a curse and faced Sonia. Behind her the three assistants peered with

fearful eyes. She seemed to Peter like a figure known in a dream and now seen for the first time in daylight. But her glance was not for him.

Straight past him she looked to the statue, and there her eyes held, fascinated. A vague trouble grew in him. He saw the assistants look to one another and whisper together.

"The Venus! The singing girl!"

"Singing girl, fools?" he cried, his weakness passing from him in a sudden childlike anger, and he turned toward the statue with outstretched arms. "No, but Venus, the goddess of—"

He stopped. His arm stiffened in the midst of its gesture, and the whole shop went dim with shadows.

Suppose a man climbed a mountain-range, expecting to view from the top wide fields of rich grain in the opposite valley, but when he reached the summit should see the awful expanse of the sea instead—such bewilderment was Peter's.

Out of the mass of shadows, reeling drunkenly before him, one object held true and whitely clear, the face of the statue. It was the sight of this which dazed him. He struck his hand heavily against his forehead with a groan, and stared again. The illusion still held. He made a long stride closer to it.

No, it was not an illusion. It was a fact—an unalterable fact in everlasting marble. The face of the statue was not Beatrice, but Sonia! He no longer heard the horrified whispers of his assistants as they stole back through the door. They left him. All Rome—all his flatterers would leave with them. He had betrayed the commission of the Pope.

It was not Beatrice he had made, but the image of a nameless girl—a singing, barbarian girl! He felt like a man awaked from a night of debauch, with the past hours a blank in his mind while a companion sits beside him and reconstructs his wild exploits during that lapse of memory.

He turned again.

"It is I! It is I!" she was whispering over and over. "But you have made me more beautiful. I never knew—Peter—"

She ran to him and caught his hands.

"I thought you hated me, and I have been wrong! You have thought of me as I have thought of you. I could only make my yearning for you into songs, but you have made me beautiful in white, eternal stone! Peter!"

In some way he found her trembling in his arms while a low murmur troubled her throat and made her smile—the smile of Venus which all that day he had labored to make in marble! She was no longer that mute mystery which he had left in England. The difference between the old Sonia and the new was the difference between sleep and waking, water and wine, the spoken word and the song. Yes, the chrysalis was broken, and she had shaken out butterfly wings.

What did she say to him? He did not know. He could not distinguish the words, but only the change of her voice, a velvet softness and warmth. And he spoke to her words which found their way to his lips without his volition.

He drew closer. Her expression was that of one who drinks. He stared over her head at the white Venus glimmering above them. She smiled a benediction, and Peter understood.

"Sonia!" he cried, "I know it all at last!"

"What do you know, Peter—dear Peter?"

"You have taken the veil from my heart! You have opened the door for me! You have led me by the hand into a bright and glorious hall! There sit the immortals who have created beauty. I see their shadowy lips pledging me above the wine."

Her eyes closed. She clung to him, swaying.

She whispered: "Tell me all. I am blind. Let me see with your eyes!"

"What is the pleasure or wrath of the Pope? Sonia, we are a whole world in ourselves. Look! There are a thousand sorrows on the lips of Venus; and your lips, sweet Sonia, are wet as honey-dew; your love is a magic vintage—wine of the soul! Wine of the soul! I drink of it! Sonia, Sonia, I am drunk with your beauty!"

She said: "I have crossed half the world to hear you speak!"

"It is not new. I feel as if our love were some divine, remembered thing."

"Far south—far south you have told me this a thousand years ago. And while you spoke the wind stirred in the palm-trees over us, and the moonlight ran like water on the limbs of dancing girls before us; and the stars were the golden eyes of heaven seeing us; and the very gods leaned from their thrones to know our love!"

"And there is music, Sonia! The rhythm—the fierce, glad rhythm—can you not hear it? Hush! Can you not hear it now?"

"Yes, for it is the beating of our hearts!"

"We must talk no more now, Sonia. We must fly from Rome as quickly as swift horses will bear us."

"What is there to fear?"

"The wrath of the Holy Father. He wished a portrait of Beatrice della Marca, and I have made a portrait of thee. He will be terribly angered. His favors and his money have been showered upon me. He will throw me into prison. Did you see how the three fellows sneaked off? Even now they may be gone to tell what I have done, and then vengeance will overtake me."

And still they did not go, but talked on or fell into silences while the shadows drew out in the workshop and the Venus became a glimmering thing in white, to be guessed at rather than seen.

And while they still stood together the doors flew open again. They looked out and saw that the night was come, and against the night shone four lanterns, borne by a train of armed men. The lights flashed on the helmet and drawn sword of him who stepped forward. Peter made a stride to meet him.

"You have come for me?" he said quietly.

"Are you the master, Pietro Warburton?"

"I am he."

"And the singing girl—is this she? Hold up your light, Oranno!"

One of the men raised his lantern, and the glow fell on the face of Sonia, and upon the head of the Venus.

"Aye, it is she. Strange! You must go with us, both of you."

"Both?" asked Peter. "What reason is in that? This is a girl who has but just come to Rome. She has done no wrong!"

"My orders are clear. A secretary to his holiness gave them to me."

"Let her go free, captain, and I shall vouch for her when she is wanted."

"That cannot be. Sir, my orders are strict. Will you walk before us? In that way no attention will be called to you."

Peter turned to Sonia and whispered: "Be brave. There is no danger to you. All shall yet be well. Go with them quietly."

She smiled as if she heard his voice but not his words, and they took their way through the streets to the castle of Sant' Angelo. Under the arch of the entrance their feet beat loud echoes up, but down the halls within even the echoes were muffled.

"Are our cells close together?" asked Peter of the captain who had conducted the capture.

"Of course not," he answered. "Your room is in the east tower, while her cell—"

Peter took out his purse and passed it to the captain.

"Use this money to buy her comforts she will need. And perhaps you can lodge her better than your instructions."

"It shall be done, signor." He bowed to the liberality of the sculptor.

"But if she is not cared for, fellow," said Peter sternly, "I have friends, and they shall remember thee!"

Peter's guards stopped at a door and opened it with a screeching key. Sonia passed on between two soldiers, and even by the torchlight Peter could see that she had not paled. Peter turned into his room.

He had expected a little lightless place no larger than the usual cell. Instead, he found a spacious apartment, well furnished, and with an alcove used as a bedchamber. Two ample windows admitted light and air. Their bars were of the flimsiest nature, but Peter felt that to escape down the vast wall of the castle would be impossible.

Not many years later that impossibility was accomplished by the inimitable Benvenuto Cellini, with the assistance of a rope made of bedding and at the expense of a

broken leg. To the agility of Peter the same feat might have been comparatively easy, but he had no thought of escape. While Sonia lay in the castle this was beyond his dreams.

"If there is anything we can bring for your comfort, master—" began the captain.

"There is nothing," said Peter.

"Or a friend to whom we could send a message?"

"Guido Strochini. He will pay you for your pains. Tell him where I now lodge. That is all."

The captain said his adieus with the utmost formality, and in a moment the door closed upon Peter. The lock ground ponderously home. He went to the barred casement and stared out over the dim spires of Rome, and down to the street, starred here and there with moving lights.

Scarcely an hour before he had been a notable figure in that city. Now he was less important than the simple Englishman who swung his hammer in a petty London shop. Yet still he felt no sorrow. He was like the merchant who hears in the same hour of the loss of a hundred shillings and the gain of a hundred pounds.

And that night Peter slept in prison like a tired child.

CHAPTER XXXI.

BEATRICE AND SONIA.

HE woke with a knocking on his door, and the groan and rattle of the key in the lock. Guido Strochini entered—the figure of a guard showed for an instant behind him—and the door closed again. Peter sprang out of bed, tossed his mantle around his shoulders, but Strochini gave back hurriedly to the door. He seemed, indeed, to be in a sudden terror. Peter stopped short and stared at him.

"What the devil, Guido?" he asked sharply. "Why do you watch me as a dog watches a panther?"

"Nay, nay, nay!" said Guido, nevertheless edging still closer to the door and keeping a keen eye upon his friend. "You must not excite yourself, dear Peter."

"What in the fiend's name is this?"

roared Peter. "I'm no tenth wonder for you to gape at."

He made another step toward his friend, but Strochini caught open the door and slipped half out into the corridor, while his eyes grew large with real fear.

"Come back," said Peter, with a sense of uneasy apprehension. "Have I changed, Guido? Have I turned into a scarecrow that you run away on the sight of me?"

"No, no. You are very well, Peter; but you must be tired. Lie down again, and I will come in."

"Why, I am broad awake," said Peter, with a frown; "and why should I lie down?"

"You are red with excitement again," said Strochini, "and I shall be blamed for working you up to this humor. I will not come in unless you lie down in the bed again!"

"If I loved you one whit less," growled Peter, "I would break your sconce for this mummary. Nevertheless, here I am in bed again. Now tell me what devil has brought you here to act like this?"

"All in good time," said Strochini, and to the further astonishment of Peter the satirist crossed himself devoutly before he entered the room. "All in good time I shall answer your questions, my dear lad. In the mean time the thing for you is absolute quiet. Your face is thin. Your eyes are somewhat sunken. You are very ill, Pietro!"

"I tell you I was never better. I wish there was a glass for me to see how horribly I have changed in twelve hours! But I won't try to understand you, Guido. You got my message?"

In the mean time Strochini had fixed his penetrating eye upon Peter as though he strove to bore into his inmost thoughts. By degrees his strange fears seemed to be slipping from his memory. At this question he brightened at once and fell into his usual gay manner as he answered.

"Your message!" scoffed Strochini. "My dear lad, by the time your message reached me your news was stale and cold."

"But who told you? I had scarcely reached the castle when—"

"I was at home with a lady, tasting

fruit and wine, when in runs a messenger from Beatrice della Marca: 'Come as fast as a fleet horse will carry you.' And I went faster. I reached her panting, but she had less breath than I. She ran to me with a scared look, like a child that's seen a ghost. 'Messer Pietro!' she stammered out twice or thrice. 'And what the devil of him?' said I.

"'He is taken—he is gone mad—and is taken to Sant' Angelo!' But the sight of her took me back to life. She was wringing her hands, and her lips trembled a time or two before she could get out a word.

"'Tell me!' she cried out. 'He has called you his friend. Will you serve him in his need? Tell me how we shall save him from the Pope?'

"'My money, my blood, and my good repute are at his service,' I said at once.

"With that she stammered out a tale how your apprentices had run to a secretary in the Vatican with a wild story that you had made of the Venus not a portrait of Beatrice della Marca, but a common singing girl. Sanseverino was in the room and heard the tale, the devil take him. He rushed at once to the Holy Father—you know the burly churchman loves us not—and gave him the tale. His holiness was sick, and in his grief and anger ordered the confinement of you, and, of course, of the girl likewise if she could be found.

"And here she broke off, Pietro, and as I am a true man she threw herself onto a chair and burst into real tears of real passion. By my heart, she thinks well of you. I told her that wine must have done it in you, and not your real self. She grew a little pacified at that, but she went on to talk of a singing girl with red hair who had passed beneath a casement at which she and you stood. You had acted strangely and rushed out of the room. By God, Peter, from the way she talked you will soon be the heir of old Della Marca. When she named the singing girl, a devil came into her eyes, a green devil of jealousy."

He stopped for breath and threw himself into a chair.

"How Rome hums with it! How Rome hums with it! The Borgia himself never made a greater stir!"

He changed his voice, and something of his former awe came back in his eyes.

"And to think this devil could have power over you!" he said. "Peter, can you tell me how the impulse came?"

"I can't tell. I had done the rest of the figure and waited for the head—waited until some great idea for the face should come to me—waited to find a soul in Beatrice, if you will have it so! And I never found one!"

"Instead of finding her soul, you put the face of another woman on the Venus?"

He leaned forward in his earnestness.

"Tell me more about the singing girl. Can you remember any strangeness about her? Any unearthly light behind her eyes?"

"Yes; golden stars shining through a deep-blue sky."

"So! So! But tell me what was in your mind when you carved the head?"

"It was like a dream to me," said Peter slowly—"a great thought came to me. I suddenly saw the head of the Venus. I went to my shop and threw a veil over the model of Beatrice. I don't know. I thought I was making her face, if I thought of it at all—but I felt that I had seen in a vision the true Venus—the goddess of love.

"I worked with a blind fury all the day. The face of the vision grew out of the stone of its own accord. And the hammer and chisel in my hand seemed to have volition and intelligence of their own. I was merely the involuntary force which held them. The statue was done with the day. I turned. There stood the girl. The Venus was the singing girl—Sonia!"

"Ha!"

"I had known her in England. She had followed me here."

"Alone?"

"Yes. I knew that I had ruined the Pope's marble. I did not care. I do not care now. I am happy. For I stood in front of her and told her that I loved her."

"But Beatrice—oh, ye saints! She will be crazed—"

"And presently the door opened. It was night. I was taken here. Now, Guido, I have no care for myself, but for the girl. It may be that in their madness they will find some fault in her—"

"Yes," said Strochini, with a sinister dryness, "that is quite possible. By the saints, I begin to think Beatrice may be wrong. Love might be witchcraft enough to work this miracle!"

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing, nothing, dear Peter. But I must go back to a certain proud lady with a message that will break her heart. Be-shrew me if I am ever again a messenger in such affairs! Farewell! I shall be present at your trial before the Pope."

He took Peter's hand in a strong grasp and went from the room into the corridor where the guard stood watch.

"Have you the care of Messer Warburton?" he asked.

"Yes, I am Jacopo."

"Here's money for you. See that he has everything he wants—except rope to hang himself. He may speak strangely—and particularly of a woman called Sonia—the girl who was taken with him."

"I understand, sir."

"Humor him in everything. Let him understand that he has his will."

The man winked and grinned broadly.

"And now tell me, what have they done with the girl Sonia?"

"She was put first in an upper chamber, much like this."

"Aye—at first."

"But then a charge was brought against her—"

"Of witchcraft?"

"Yes. And now she is lodged in the lowest range of the dungeons."

The fellow shivered in disgust and made a grimace.

"A place of rats and mold and water, sir!"

Strochini stared at him, then shrugged his shoulders and went off slowly down the corridor, pausing several times and shaking his head. The guard looked after him with some concern.

"To my eye," he said at last, "the girl is as right a lass as walks in Rome!" He eyed the coins in his hand and then slipped them into his pouch. "But if she has sold her soul to the devil, have I the money to ransom her back?"

Strochini went directly from the castle to

Beatrice. He found her walking up and down a room with an impatient step like some caged beast of prey. Her face was a singularly transparent white, like that of one who has watched long over a sick-bed.

"You are wrong," he said; "there's no witchcraft in this affair. If he's enchanted, Beatrice, it's by the girl's beauty."

"A common singer of the streets!" said Beatrice.

"It seems he had known her in England, and she followed him here," went on Strochini.

The color faded marvelously from her throat and cheeks.

"What does he say of her? Guido, tell me it all. How did he look?"

"Feverish, thin of face, wild of eye.

"You are ill, Peter," I said.

"What of the girl Sonia?" he answered.

"What madness made you change the statue?" I asked him.

"The face of Sonia," he answered."

Beatrice made a little gesture to check him.

"Stop!" she cried as soon as she could speak.

Strochini felt as if he had some beautiful tigress under the whip. The cruel pleasure thrilled him.

"But you asked me of him?" he complained.

"Yes; tell me more."

Strochini raised the whip again and struck.

"I care nothing for myself," he would say. "But the girl, Strochini—"

"Ah!" moaned Beatrice.

Strochini's heart melted.

"I would give a king's ransom to see him freed from this folly," he said.

"I have sent a message to him through a man of influence. He has heard. I think he already believes. If we can manage it so, then Pietro will be saved—restored to favor!"

"But this charge of witchcraft, Beatrice! The penalty is death, and the heart of the Holy Father is merciful. Moreover, if Peter hears that the girl is condemned through us—"

She uttered a little cry that made Strochini wince.

After a moment, in which she stood with her hands clutched tightly to her breast: "For a time the—the spell may hold him. But in the end—in the end he will forget! Tell me he will forget, Guido!"

"Aye. Forget? Yes, yes! But the penalty is burning at the stake for the girl, Beatrice! If I am called for testimony, I shall tell the Holy Father my conviction—that there is no black art in Pietro's case."

Her eyes glittered a moment, and her lips pressed together.

"Would you believe in witchcraft if you heard the confession from her own lips?" she asked suddenly.

"What a fiend she is!" whispered Guido to himself. Then aloud: "You cannot hope that she will be mad enough to sign her own death-warrant."

"I shall go myself," said Beatrice. "I shall go to see the girl myself."

"Why, in the name of Heaven?" asked Guido.

"I wish to see her. Did you say she had followed Peter all the way from England?"

"Yes!"

"Then she loves him!"

"Perhaps," said Guido.

"If she loves him, she shall confess!" cried Beatrice.

"If you do that, you'll be the greater enchantress."

"Nevertheless, I shall do it!"

"And how?"

"I cannot tell you. You would not understand!"

"I would not," said Guido. "I think I shall have to get me a book and write it full of facts about women, as Peter has done!"

As soon as he left, Beatrice went to her rooms and called two maids. At her direction they brought forth the most costly and beautiful of her gowns. She drove her maids to a greater speed with stinging words, and yet when they could do no more she lingered still over that toilet as if she went to interview a king instead of a nameless girl in a prison.

One servant had already ridden post-haste to the Vatican to acquire the necessary permit before she could be admitted

to see Sonia. When he returned she set out.

Up to the very walls of Sant' Angelo she urged on her escort to greater and greater speed. But when she passed through the gate her eagerness waned, and cold uncertainty took its place.

The officer of the castle to whom her permit was presented allowed her to enter at once. He suggested with some confusion that it would be better to have the girl brought up to her ladyship, because the way was long and down many stairs. But Beatrice insisted that they must speak absolutely alone.

When he asked her if she wished no protection, she showed him a tiny, silver-hilted poniard with a blade four inches long, a thin bit of keen steel which a child could press to the heart with the force of one finger.

With that they started down the steeply winding stairs, the officer first. Being a man of some family and culture, and now in the presence of Rome's social queen, he hummed or whistled a tune as he walked, and kept the rhythm by jangling a bunch of the heavy prison keys which he carried. One of her servants preceded Beatrice, and another followed her, both carrying lanterns, for the stairway was dark as midnight after they passed the first turn.

So they came into the lowest passage, apparently hewn through the solid rock. The lantern-light glittered along the low ceiling, where innumerable beads of water had gathered like sweat on the brow of a man. Under foot the same moisture made the stones slippery, and at every breath of the sick air the lantern-bearers shuddered dismally.

Their mistress paid no heed to the dismal passage, but when the jailer stopped at a low door so cunningly set into the solid rock that not a crack was visible, she grew pale.

"So please you," he suggested, "it may be well if I accompanied you when you speak with the woman within. These lowest cells"—he smiled somewhat apologetically—"sometimes make the prisoners a trifle desperate, and it might be that this low creature would forget—"

"Open the door at once," said Beatrice. "I have no fear."

The door opened silently upon an utter void of dark—rats squeaked within and scurried to their holes—a breath of stale air came coldly out to Beatrice. She strained her eyes into the cell, but could see nothing.

"Does—does a human being live in—in that hole?" she asked.

"Only for a short time," said the jailer suavely; "and it is only used for the most desperate cases—murder, witchcraft, and other crimes too foul to be named!"

"Give me the lantern," said Beatrice firmly, after another moment of pale-faced waiting. "I shall enter alone, and do you close the door after me."

She held the lantern high and advanced through the opening. At once the door shut behind her. With the light in her eyes, she could not see a yard straight before her, and lowered her eyes.

The floor was far wetter than the stones of the corridor, and a short distance from her, lying on the green mold, lay a loaf of bread beside a small pitcher of water. The loaf had been tunneled and eaten away to a crust by the rats.

"If you have come for me, I am prepared," said a low voice.

Beatrice lowered the lantern and shaded her eyes with her hand. In a corner she made out a shadowy figure. She moved the lantern until the light fell full upon Sonia, who stood leaning against the angle of the damp wall.

She had started from the wall at the entrance of Beatrice; but, seeing that it was a woman who stood before her, she resumed her former posture, her hands locked loosely before her, and her head slightly bowed. At sight of that forlorn attitude, the pity which rose in Beatrice turned cold. "You are the woman Sonia?" she asked.

The great eyes raised, considered her a silent moment, and then sank again toward the floor.

"Are you the woman Sonia," repeated Beatrice—"held here for foul witchcraft?"

A singular half smile stirred the lips of the prisoner.

"I am she," she answered, and again the soft music of the voice thrilled Beatrice. She stepped closer.

"I am Beatrice della Marca!" she said, and turned the lantern so that the light would fall on her own features. Sonia had started into life at the name. Now her eyes burned against the face of Beatrice. "I have come to help you from the prison. I have come as your friend."

Again Sonia smiled.

"You are she whom Peter Warburton modeled for his statue," she asserted, "and therefore you cannot be my friend. The walls are thick. How can you help me from the prison?"

"I know the words which will unlock these doors."

"What would you have of me?" asked Sonia coldly.

"One small thing. Confess to your witchcraft. You are silent, and you smile again. But have no fear. When you confess, you shall be given a light sentence, a mere nominal sentence. The Holy Father will exile you from his states, and I myself will give you money which will keep you in comfort the rest of your days."

"And what of Peter?"

"He will receive new marble to make the statue which he has spoiled. All will be forgiven him, if you confess."

"That may not be."

"And why?"

"Because he loves me!"

"It was the madness of a moment, like wine. To-day he repents, and to-morrow he will forget."

"You speak your wish, but not the fact. You, also, love him!"

"This is folly, utter folly! I am Beatrice of the house of Della Marca, and this is a nameless Englishman."

"You stammer as you deny, and your voice lingers on his name."

"You gibe at me. Then it is useless for me to say more to you?"

Sonia made no answer.

"You are reconciled to the death by fire?"

"My innocence will be clear as the light of day."

"Have you proofs?"

"His love for me is proof enough."

"That is the very thing which will damn you, for will the Holy Father believe that love could so bewitch the senses of a man that he would throw away his fame and name for a singing girl?"

Sonia's eyes glinted, and she advanced a step from her corner.

"Go and leave me to my rats. I would not harm you!"

"I shall not go, for I have not done! If you come nearer, remember, I am armed!"

The thin-bladed poniard glittered in her hand.

"It would be a simple way to end it all. A single pressure of this knife and Peter Warburton would be free to walk on to greatness!"

"You would not dare murder!"

"Say you so? What voice would accuse Beatrice della Marca when she killed to save herself from the madness of a witch she would have helped from prison?"

She stepped forward, the dagger quivering eagerly, like the light in a stalking panther's eye. Sonia did not wince.

"But I have no wish to frighten you, girl. Tell me for the last time—have you determined against a confession? Learn this—that the Holy Father has already resolved his mind of your guilt. It is not long before you shall stand before him. Oh, be wise and tempt his mercy rather than his justice!"

"Why do you come here to tempt me? I have no wish for freedom which *he* does not share! Is my life worth as much as our love? Go, go! I had rather have the squealing of the rats and the whispering of the dark than to hear your voice!"

The voice of Beatrice trembled with her wrath and sense of failure.

"I had not dreamed that such selfish cruelty could exist!" she cried. "You have followed him like a blight of Egypt and ruined all his bright hopes with your coming, and now you will not undo part of your wrongs! Is this your love for him? This is the love of the vampire who sucks the blood from the hearts of men!"

"In what way have I wronged him?" asked Sonia, and though her voice was

steady her lips trembled. That sight was like a cheer of victory to Beatrice.

"In what way?" she said rapidly. "In all ways! He was on the high road to fame before you came. The protégé of the Holy Father, the friend of Guido Strochini, that horrible man, the sculptor whom cardinals named with pride as their friend. And now you have struck him down from his high place into the dust at your side where you grovel!"

"No, no!" moaned Sonia. "It is not true! From his own lips he told me that I had taken the veil from his eyes; that through me he came to see—"

"Peace!" cried Beatrice, trembling. "A madness has come to him, but it will pass. You may undo part of the crime against him. Confess freely before the Holy Father. He will remove you gently from Rome. You may live your life as you will in another place, but spare Peter from further ruin! If you confess all will be well. The Pope shall forgive him; the great will return to his side; Rome will be again at his feet!"

"And our love—"

"Do you think he prizes any woman beside his work with the chisel and hammer? Do you think he would change all the women in the world for one creation of beauty in white stone?"

She saw Sonia wince and shut her eyes as if she had been struck heavily across the face.

"For a day or two he might fall into a mood for thee, but the hammer is the only wife he can ever love truly. His work will drive you a thousand leagues back in his memory, a pretty, forgotten thing—a singing girl! Pah!"

"He said—"

"Words are easily born. But look you, girl, if you free him from this slavish control he will go on to greatness!"

"And to you," said Sonia, breathing quickly.

Beatrice raised the lantern above her head. The light flamed on her jewels. It flashed in the diamond net that rested over her throat. It glimmered over her gown of woven threads of gold.

"Will you compare yourself with me?"

"Alas! you are beautiful!" she said.

"What can you bring him except the companionship of beggars and disgrace? In my halls he shall company with princes! He shall inherit a vast wealth! He shall quarry his own marbles in Carrara and bring the stone of Greece in his own ships! What can you give him to compare with this? Ruin, disgrace, scorn, shame and hate! Suppose you live. He will see the token of his fall in the very brightness of your eyes! His love will turn to loathing! His glance will be an eternal reproach!"

"Lower the lantern! Mine eyes dazzle," said Sonia.

"Ah," said Beatrice, "why do I say these words to a nameless creature? It is not love you have for him, but a foul passion, for love would make you die a thousand times before you would be his ruin!"

She stopped, marveling at the change which came about in the face of Sonia. The crimson of rage and fear died away. Her eyes fell on Beatrice with a level glance, under which the great lady trembled so that all her jewels glowed and flashed.

"Lady Beatrice," she said, "I have little knowledge, and I should thank you for showing me the true way!"

The poniard of Beatrice clinked on the floor as she clasped her hands.

"You will make the confession? You will confess? Ah, I knew that those wide eyes told of a great heart beneath them! I will make you rich, and—"

Sonia drew a quick breath and turned her eyes suddenly away.

"Do not name it! Let me be alone! Go, for I shall do all that you wish!"

"Ah, God! And what will you tell them?"

"I have heard a tale of witchcraft. I shall speak of wax images. I—I pray you go!"

"Sonia!"

"Do not touch me!"

"Will you hate me for telling you—the truth?"

"The thought of him has been in my heart like a child in the womb of a mother, and now that love shall be still-born and have a grave without a name."

"I shall find a way to make you happy."

"Aye, by leaving me."

"If you are alone I fear for you. Your eyes are wild."

"I shall not be alone. The priests say God comes to those who suffer. Farewell, Lady Beatrice!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

JUDGMENT.

WITH Sanseverino in a chair beside him and a little to the rear, Leo X waited in a small room of the Vatican for the entry of the criminals. It had been suggested that he leave the trial and the judgment to Sanseverino, but his interest in Peter and the unusual nature of the case determined him to give it his own attention.

It was a rare exception, for as a rule his gentle nature revolted against the trial and sentence of crimes which called for the death penalty. Accordingly, he gathered all those who were familiar with the plan of the Venus statue or intimate with Peter.

If the sculptor had been changed by some violent exterior force, his friends could best testify to the greatness and peculiarity of that change. Around the room sat the captain of the arrest and Antonio della Marca, with Beatrice beside him; Guido Strochini, and a secretary to record the proceedings.

First of the prisoners, Peter entered between two armed men. At sight of the escort the Holy Father raised the inevitable spy-glass to his eye and then lifted his hand.

"Stand outside the door, sirs," he commanded. "Messer Peter himself shall be my guard in case of danger."

Then as Peter knelt before him: "Rise, my son. Strange, wild tidings have come to me of thee. But what? That strong heart of thine never conceived knavery! No, I shall not believe it. Not a word to me! Take yonder chair."

Peter had scarcely taken the designated chair when the door opened again and two other soldiers, tall fellows of the Swiss guard, appeared, leading Sonia. Each of them held her firmly by the arm, but the Holy Father showed no intention of giving her greater freedom. Like the rest of the people in the room, he stirred in his chair and leaned a little forward.

"Is this the woman?" he said at last. "She is young—young and comely for such foul practise."

"The black art of knavery hath often a white face," rumbled Sanseverino.

"Peace, Sanseverino! And yet you say the truth. It must be so! Secretary, examine this woman!"

The secretary rose, holding his scroll ready to write down the answers to the questions which he had already prepared. The Swiss turned Sonia with unnecessary hands to face him, and Peter clenched his fists. His glaring eyes crossed the frightened and nervous glance of Beatrice, but he did not see her.

"Look well to the Englishman, Holy Father," said Sanseverino hastily, "for there's a red devil in his eye. He'll be at the throats of the Swiss in another moment!"

"Hush, Sanseverino; he knows in what presence he sits, even if he be quite enchanted. Begin, secretary."

"But by the mass," said the burly cardinal under his breath, "she seems quite singularly composed."

"Are you the woman Sonia?" asked the monotonous voice of the secretary.

"My name is Sonia," she answered, and because, perhaps, of the tense expectation in the room, the soft quality of her voice caused a little stir.

"Ask by whom she is directly accused?" broke in the Pope.

"Let the person stand forth who accuses the woman, Sonia, of the practise of black arts and enchantment," said the secretary.

The Lady Beatrice della Marca rose from her chair.

"It is—" she began, but here her eye crossed the furious and horrified glance of Peter, and she faltered.

"Holy Father!" cried Peter, springing up, "the Lady Beatrice has never known this girl, and her testimony and accusation are worthless as—"

"Be silent, Messer Peter," said the Pope, but not unkindly. "You shall not speak unless you are first required. Proceed, Beatrice, my child."

"Do you, Beatrice della Marca," said the secretary, turning to her, "do you accuse

the woman, Sonia, of the practise of black art and witchcraft against the person of a Christian man, Peter Warburton?"

"I do," said Beatrice faintly.

Her eyes were upon the face of Sonia, but the latter looked straight before her.

"Watch the woman, Holy Father," advised Sanseverino, leaning close to the Pope, "for she cannot face her accuser."

The secretary turned back to Sonia.

"You are here accused," he said, "of the practise of black enchantment exercised upon the person of Peter Warburton. It is stated here in writing, which you shall overlook if you so desire."

"I do not so desire," said Sonia in the same calm voice.

"Then it is stated herein," went on the secretary, "that you have so worked upon the mind of Peter Warburton that when he wrought on a statue called a statue of Venus, and to be made in the shape and the portrait of the Lady Beatrice della Marca, at the special commission of the Holy Father, you have so worked upon him that in a moment of madness he made, induced by your art, not her semblance, but a likeness of thee. This is so written herein. Stand up, Peter Warburton."

Peter rose.

"Speak," said the secretary. "Do you, or do you not know this man, known as Peter Warburton?"

"I do know him."

"You have heard the charge against you. You acknowledge the man who confronts you. Before this examination proceeds, state here, do you or do you not confess to the working of these enchantments upon him?"

"She must face the man when she speaks of him," said Sanseverino. "She has not even turned toward him, and unless she has eyes in the back of her head how could she know him?"

"Turn to the man," commanded the Pope.

She moved slowly about, her eyes raised by slow degrees from the floor until they reached the face of Peter. She cried out and caught her arm to her face. A hum and a breathless whisper passed around the room.

"Do you or do you not confess?" droned the secretary.

"Sonia, be brave! Cast the lie in their teeth!" cried Peter. "I swear they shall not harm thee! Speak to them!"

She moaned, turned from him, and dropping her arm from her face: "I confess it freely!"

"Merciful God!" cried Leo. "Can such guilt lie in so fair a flower?"

"She shrank and dared not face him!" urged Sanseverino. "The devil was shamed to look upon his handiwork!"

Beatrice, pale but eager, clung to the arm of Antonio della Marca. He patted her hand but kept his eyes in horror on the face of the confessed witch.

"It is written," droned the secretary, "that the woman, Sonia, has confessed. It must be further—"

"Hold!" cried Peter, waking from the white-faced trance into which Sonia's statement had stricken him. "Here is some devilish work of underhand and—"

"Silence, Peter Warburton!" said Leo sternly. "This matter concerns not thee alone, but the welfare of all Christian souls. Proceed, secretary."

"It must be farther learned," went on the secretary, "in what manner were your arts practised!"

Sonia dropped to her knees and stretched her arms to the Pope.

"Have I not said enough?" she cried. "The guilt be on my head for all that he hath done, but spare me the telling of all that I have done!"

Peter sat with his face buried in his hands. He groaned now, and Beatrice della Marca shuddered as if the sound came from her own throat.

"Poor woman," said his holiness, nevertheless shrinking in his chair a little from those outstretched hands, as if he feared a baleful influence which might fly from the tips of her outstretched fingers. "Poor woman, I may not spare thee from this farther suffering. It is not for my pleasure, our Father in heaven witness me, but for the future safety and understanding of men. Speak!"

She rose, half dragged up by the Swiss guards.

"Holy Father," said Peter, grinding his teeth, "be merciful to me. Bid those hired dogs loose their hands from the arms of my lady, or I shall not answer for myself even in thy presence."

"Think of your safety, Holy Father," whispered Sanseverino.

"I fear me," said Leo, "that I think too much upon it. Loose her arms, fellows. Now speak to me and speak verity."

"I knew," said Sonia in a faint voice, "that he worked upon the statue of the Lady Beatrice della Marca."

She paused.

"It is recorded," said the secretary. "Speak on!"

"Of wax I made an image of the statue."

"But how, woman," said the Pope, "did you know the semblance of the woman whom he modeled? Are you not but recently come to Rome?"

"An evil spirit, Azra, came at my bidding, thus!" She made a singular sign with her hand. "He fears me, and he serves my pleasure. When I commanded he described all the acts of the man Peter Warburton."

Her voice grew thick. She stopped a moment; she hesitated and then went on determinedly: "And drew on the blank void the semblance of the statue. From that I copied. I made the wax figure a perfect copy—with the aid of Azra!"

The Holy Father made the sign of the cross and glanced up. The others in the room, with the exception of Peter and Beatrice, followed his example.

"Then," she went on, her words falling almost to a whisper, "I painted all the part of the statue below the head in white—but the head itself I painted in black to confuse his thoughts when he labored on it. Then I came forthwith to Rome, and there I went to a place below the window of the Lady Beatrice della Marca, when I knew that Peter Warburton was in her house—I was singing beneath that window. He looked down to me. Seeing my face, with the spell of my enchantments about him, he could

not choose but make my image as the head of his statue!"

Her head bowed. The silence held, moment after moment. Color was coming back to Beatrice. Peter and Strochini stared at each other, incredulous.

"Is there ought more to confess?" asked the secretary. "Or is the Holy Father satisfied with what has been heard?"

"The ways of God are wondrous," mused Leo, "and to adjudge death to this fearful soul—"

Sonia started at the word "death," but was immediately quiet again.

"This fearful soul in this lovely garb of flesh," went on Leo, "it is a grim thing, but there is a sword in the hand of Justice, and at times we must wield it. Lead the girl away, and thou, Sanseverino, my right hand of iron, see that she is punished in the way the law directs!"

The Swiss took the arms of Sonia again, and led her toward the door.

"Take care for the Englishman!" said Sanseverino sharply. "The devil still works in his soul, and madness is on him!"

Even as he spoke Peter sprang up and barred the way to the door. The guards shrank back from him, loosed the arms of Sonia, and left her free before him.

"Go your way and let me go in mine, or else you may be more evilly blasted than before!" she said, but she dared not look in the white horror of Peter's face.

"Guards, take her away! Mad Messer Peter, stand back!" called Leo.

"Sonia," he was saying, "tell me that you have not spoken truly. Dear heart, at one word from you I will deny and annihilate all that mine ear has heard. Tell me that you are as true as you are dear to me—still dear to me, so help me God—Sonia!"

She cried out again as she had cried out when she first looked at him, and then dropped to her knees, clinging to him.

"Holy Father," cried Beatrice, "the devil has taken hold of him again! Free him with your power!"

With one hand Peter fondled the head of Sonia. The other hand he stretched to the Holy Father.

"Is this the way of wizardry?" he cried. "Holy Father, if there has been witchcraft,

it has been the power which has made her speak the false confession."

"Hear my voice also," called Strochini. "For the sake of Peter Warburton's fame, I have hoped against hope that there was truly enchantment in the madness which made him change the statue. Holy Father, in spite of the words which the girl has spoken, I do not believe her guilt!"

"Guido!" said Beatrice in soft fury, "you shall live to count this the blackest day of your life!"

"Is it marvelous strange?" said Leo. "Now, may God guide us rightly here!"

"Holy Father," said Beatrice, "has not the woman spoken of her free will?"

"Look on them now!" said Strochini, for Peter had raised Sonia, and she clung to him, weeping bitterly. "When has the black art taken on such a form? If it has often, then I wish me bewitched!"

"Saint Peter witness me!" said the Pope. "Yonder is a theme for Raphael. Yet she is damned by her own confession. Evil is still more fearful when it comes in a lovely form."

"Hear me, Holy Father!" said Strochini. "If some evil force worked in him, it would surely show in the face of his statue. Let us go to the house in which it stands. And there it may be that you will arrive at a truer judgment."

"True, Guido," said Leo, "it may be well, and we shall go thither. But it would need a miracle to save this girl's lost soul."

"You are ill, child," Antonio della Marca was saying to Beatrice. "I shall call a horse litter and carry you home. You tremble, and your face is hot with fever."

"Nay," she said, and her eyes held fiercely to Sonia and Peter, clinging together, "I shall go mad if I do not hear the Pope's judgment with my own ears! Ah, I do not fear his wisdom so much as the voice of God against me."

The whole train was mounted in a few moments, a small squadron of the Swiss guard being horsed to escort them, and they hurried through the streets to the workshop of Peter. Pacing up and down before the shop, with his ominous bodyguard near, strode Lord Henry of Gilford. As Peter alighted the noble rushed to him, thrust

aside Strochini as if he were a foot-boy, and caught the hands of his friend.

"Ah, Peter," he murmured, "I have heard a fearful tale of your misfortune. It is not true! Nay, you need not answer, for I see you at liberty."

Peter smiled sadly.

"It is true," he answered. "This is the end of my brief day in Rome, Harry. They have brought me here to my last trial. The life of a woman now depends on the eloquence of a dumb stone—the face of a marble statue which I have carved with my clumsy hands. Come and stand close beside me, for I need a friend."

But Gilford was staring, rapt and pale, on the face of Beatrice. During the next few moments he never moved his eyes.

In the mean while, one of the Swiss, finding the shop locked, shattered the bolt with a single stroke of his halberd. The double doors swung in under the impact of the blow, and the train dismounted and entered the shop.

Outside the sun was bright. The very touch of the fresh air had been enough to banish all thoughts of enchantments and black arts. Now, as they entered the shop, the spell of the artist fell truly over them.

On all sides stood marbles and fragments of veiled statuary. Here lay a chisel, perhaps just as he had dropped it as he finished the last stroke. There lay the hammer with the handle polished by his grip. Peter strode to the Venus and seized the cloth.

"It may be you will find little beauty here," he said, "but ah, sirs, if you look closely you will find an honest and mighty aspiration that could have no black art in it."

And he threw the covering from the white marble.

Through a crack in the patched roof struggled a single broad ray of sunshine. It had played unnoticed on the grimy surface of the veiling cloth. Now it fell as golden fire on the head of the statue, and gave it glowing life among the shadows of the room. Peter could not see this, for he stood too close beside the Venus. But as his eyes glanced quickly around the circle of faces he set his teeth in despair.

They did not speak. They did not even

whisper, or shift their eyes to one another to exchange comment, but with wide glances they stared on his work. Then he saw the great arm of Sanseverino rise—saw his broad hand, all forgetful of reverence, clutch the shoulder of the pontiff—heard him say in an awful whisper: “It is enchantment indeed, but white magic!”

“Hush!” said Leo. “Do not speak. It is not a portrait of the Lady Beatrice or of any woman, but a greater thing: the goddess of love herself!”

Guido the irrepressible, the universal scoffer, his eyes shifted from the statue and fell upon Peter, where they lingered with a great awe. Then Peter heard the first truly audible sound. It was the sobbing of the Lady Beatrice.

Then a member of the Swiss guard, a burly fellow, cried out softly in his own tongue. Peter became aware of a growing murmur. The spy-glass of Pope Leo turned from the statue to its creator. He was smiling graciously and nodding, and every nod spelt a letter of the word: “Triumph.”

“Peter, friend Peter,” whispered Gilford at the sculptor’s shoulder, “you have conquered again, and, like Alexander, there are no more worlds left for you. But what think you of me? There stands the loveliest lady in Italy weeping her heart out. I will not guess why, lest the guess should make me hate thee; but how say you, Peter, will I succeed as a comforter as well as you have succeeded as a sculptor?”

“Go speak with her,” said Peter, out of an overflowing heart, “and may God prosper you!”

And while the rest thronged close about Peter, Gilford leaned close to Beatrice, whispering. Sorrow unlocks the heart, and in the end Gilford indeed prospered.

But Gilford, and indeed all the rest of the world, dropped for a time out of Peter’s consciousness. During a fortnight more he was busy putting the final touches to the Venus, but when that was done—when the marble was finally put in place and unveiled, when the cheering had died from his ears and the last of the letters of congratulation answered—all else died out of his mind, and Sonia remained.

He was content with all his big, simple heart. His turbulent past became a thing of little moment. To him this was the great adventure.

See him again a month after the unveiling of the Venus, Peter a six weeks’ married man.

The summer days have come, and after the heat and dust of the workshop Peter takes a barge down the Tiber with Sonia beside him. The river is strangely cool and quiet; the creaking of the long oars as the two rowers sway rhythmically back and forth accentuates the silence.

Peter raised his hand. His boy, who crouches at the bow of the boat, strikes his lute and sings in a light, glad voice, which wanders far away across the black, sliding waters. He ceases; the tremor of the last chord struck upon the lute dies out.

“Sonia,” says Peter, “all your life before I knew you is as unknown to me as this silence.”

She turns to him the strangely solemn face of those who are greatly happy.

“It is too sad to speak of now. Some time I shall tell you.”

“Not if it is a dreary tale.”

“Aye, but that dreary tale took me from Poland to London, Peter. Is not this worth one unhappy year?”

“From Poland?” he cried, and the rumble of his deep voice seemed strangely loud across the silent waters.

“Yes. My father was a rich landholder. He would have had me marry a silly youth with a rich father. It is a long story. Finally I put on the dress of a singing girl and took a lute and wandered away from home.”

She was silent. They heard the waters lapping in quick whispers at the prow of the boat.

“And wandered clear to London, Sonia?”

“No. First I fell into the hands of a slave-dealer. He tried to sell me many times, but I was not pleasant to my masters, and they returned me to the slave-dealer, and so he was forced to bring me with him all the way to London.”

She dropped a hand over his great clenched fist.

“You must not be so angry, Peter. All

that is past. In London I escaped and wandered through the streets until I stumbled in a drift of snow, and had not the strength to rise. I fell asleep, thinking to die, and instead I woke and found you. Isn't that like a fairy tale?"

He muttered something between his set teeth.

They had come down the river toward the portion which supported long rows of houses on either bank. Yellow lights fled across the current, and as the barge passed the shaft of light would touch the gold hair of the boy crouched at the bow, the swarthy, muscular arms of the rowers, and last of all, glint on the emerald in Sonia's hair. It was the gift of Sanseverino.

Other barges were in view, drifting downstream. Finally one came toward them, a monstrous galley brilliant with lights and

loud with music and laughter. A dozen oars rhythmically swayed and flashed on either side of it.

It came closer. There were perhaps thirty people in the boat beside the rowers. In the high seat of honor in the waist of the galley sat a lady crowned with flowers. On either side of her a negro slave held aloft a bright lantern. Behind her leaned a man who whispered in her ear.

As they passed she turned and laughed up to him. It was Beatrice della Marca with Harry of Gilford. Peter's little barge crept by them unnoticed. The great galley drove swiftly on into the night, leaving a shivering trail of laughter behind.

Sonia glanced covertly at Peter. He was staring straight before him and smiling into the dark, and Sonia leaned back with a sigh. She was content.

(The End.)

IN RETROSPECT

THE sunlight filters through the smoke and dust
And warms my sixteenth-story window-pane
Where, seated at my desk, I plan a trust
Or how to break one, which to me's the same;
It warms me and I dream of home again
The way it looked when early spring first showed
In golden buttercups along the road.

O spring! you are a rapture to the boy,
And oh, the gipsy wanderings you provoke!
I now recall with what a truant joy
I pulled the angleworm until he broke
And waited at the pond with stone to soak
The frog when he should swell his throat to sing
The universal madness of the spring.

Oft, while along the budding lane I've trod
Barefoot and bathed in April's golden sun,
I've watched my father break the stubborn sod
In fragrant, rippling furrows, one by one—
But soon, too soon, those happy days were done,
For I grew up and had to guide that share,
And so I'm glad, this spring, that I'm not there!

The One Hundredth Beggar



by Edwin Justus Mayer

"WOMEN and beggars—both make me cynical," Wentworth said.

"Women and beggars!" said the other scornfully. "Women and beggars! You are mad, Wentworth, to match the two; women are not beggarly, they are imperial; when they come to us at all, it is in wistful pomp, or in august splendor, but always in triumph and beauty; never in tattered trousers and broken shoes."

"Nevertheless, they are much the same," Wentworth replied. He had the faculty of becoming inscrutable, when he desired to. "Both of them," he went on, "beggars and women rely on sympathy to win their ends. Both make the most primitive appeal—to an emotion, to a passion. The desire of one is the corner saloon; of the other, the leading salon. The appeal of the woman is the appeal of the beggar; the appeal of the beggar is the appeal of the woman—the feminine appeal, the soft appeal, the appeal to our weakness, not to our strength."

"There are moments when weakness is no less than strength," his opponent retorted. The man had eyes quite different from the eyes of Wentworth: where the latter was inscrutable much in the same way that the Greek Fate was inscrutable, Battersea was inscrutable only because a mystic; not because of a supreme coldness and aloofness and cruelty. His eyes were almond-shaped, but to those who knew him, this was simply the perfection of a highly etched soul showing outwardly.

"I deny it," Wentworth said warmly. "Weakness is never strength; weakness is the negation of strength. Do not think me unjust. I know that ninety-nine beggars out of one hundred are frauds and fakes and worse. I know that one hundred beggars out of one hundred are frauds and fakes and worse. I have never met an honest beggar; the phrase itself is a paradox, and I deny that paradoxes are true outside of the covers of a Chesterton novel. The truth is simple and straight: hew to the line, and you do not beg."

Battersea threw back his head and laughed. "You live in a world all your own," he told Wentworth. "It is not a world of flesh, nor a world of spirit: it is a world of intellect unredeemed by fire and purpose other than the attainment of *itself*—whatever that cold, mysterious thing is. Now, I say to you, that I will grant you that ninety-nine beggars out of one hundred are frauds and fakes and worse. But—there is the one hundredth beggar."

"There is no one hundredth beggar," the other said stubbornly.

"Somewhere about this city to-night," Battersea said, "there is an old man, or a young man; an old woman or a young woman—this one is the one hundredth one. Though his or her ninety-and-nine fraudulent contemporaries are fraudulent, this one is true, this one is needy."

"Well, let us test this thing practically," Wentworth said. Wentworth worshiped

that most facile, unreal, unsubstantial thing—practicality.

"Yes, let us test this thing—mystically," said Battersea.

"First one, then the other. I tell you, Battersea, I am in dead earnest about this. For the moment I am your mortal enemy, for my philosophy and your philosophy clash, and 'my truth is the truth.' For the good of our souls, we must settle this thing, for if there *is* the one hundredth beggar, then my past life is something too dreadful to think about, too horrible to think about. I am damned—if it is true, this thing you say."

"You are wrong," Battersea said wearily, "for though our philosophies clashed until doomsday, we could live side by side, conscious of a unique striving, both of us—a striving for something the world cares nothing about—truth. We are all of us beggars before this."

"I will not be swerved by your damned obscurities!" the other cried. "Let us go on the street and settle this thing. We are two blocks from the ugliest street in the world—the Bowery. *There* is where we shall settle this thing."

"I will go with you," Battersea said, "but nothing will be proved, for I know that there is nothing to be proved; there is only something to be believed."

"Rot!" snapped Wentworth, and they went out of the restaurant and to the Bowery.

"I will walk on the other side of the way," Wentworth said, "for it is darker there and one is more likely to be approached. You will walk on this side, and follow the beggar after he has talked with me. You will follow him and see where he goes; then you will meet me at Brooklyn Bridge and tell me what you saw."

"But this will prove nothing," Battersea protested. "Out of the one hundred, how can I guarantee that you will meet the ultimate one?"

"Because you believe in miracles," Wentworth said, and added, not without a trace of emotion: "You have put the curse of doubt on me; made me hesitate in my conviction; I will not be unnerved by your damned sophistries, I will draw strength

from the very source of my weakness—beggardom—I will *prove* myself right."

Battersea said no more, but crossed the street, the ugliest street in the world, while Wentworth strolled along casually, inwardly cursing his friendly enemy for a fool and himself for a weakling. And while he was walking along, he saw a man approach him dressed in the uniform of a railway engineer. Instinctively he realized that the fellow was "sizing him up," and "He is going to beg from me!" he said to himself jubilantly.

"Now we shall see!" he thought. Across the way he saw Battersea watching him.

"Haven't had anything to eat in three days," the man mumbled. His uniform was dreadfully soiled and ragged; his face pale, and his eyes—the whites of them, at least—almost red. His shoes were badly torn.

"Nothing to eat in three days," he repeated, and perhaps taking courage from Wentworth's immobility he added quickly:

"Came from Chicago—bummed my way here—can't get a job yet—get one in the morning over at the yards—promised me—need money for supper and sleeping—just that—"

"Not an original beggar," Wentworth thought swiftly—"the usual story." He stood there, his figure and features rigid, while the beggar waited in hope and despair, a comic tragedian in the cosmic drama.

"I will tell you something," Wentworth said in a voice as clear as it was sharp—without seeming brutal or censorious.

"I have here every penny I have in the world," and his voice became vibrant and intense as he displayed the seven dollars which he had drawn from his pocket. The beggar drew back suspiciously and anxiously.

"Every penny I have in the world," Wentworth repeated moodily. "Listen:

"You have just told me you haven't eaten in three days. I have just eaten. You have just told me you haven't a cent. I have seven dollars—and a family. You haven't a job; neither have I. As it stands I am seven dollars and a family to the good. But something may

turn up for me. Now you know what this money means to me; you know how much it means to me!" His voice rose, honestly and intensively. "Listen:

"If you still say you are starving and need money for supper—and not for liquor—I will give you one of these seven dollars!"

The beggar had grown more and more amazed as Wentworth proceeded. Now he stood mute and scanned the dress of the awful philanthropist; but in the darkness and because of the dark texture of Wentworth's suit he could judge nothing. Then he lifted up his eyes to Wentworth's.

I have said that the latter had the strange and icy faculty of making himself inscrutable. He could, indeed, mobilize in his eyes every aspect of Limbo. But it was otherwise now. He was not inscrutable. His eyes were bright and open and candid—and truthful.

"I lied!" said the beggar. "Keep your money, I lied!" Before Wentworth had altered his position he was gone, ambling and almost staggering along the street. It had not occurred to Wentworth that the man was drunk.

He walked slowly to the bridge, first motioning Battersea to follow the beggar, for he scarcely knew whether the affair was a victory for himself or for his opponent. "The fellow was drunk," he said to himself uneasily, and stood waiting for Battersea. What can be keeping him?" he thought, after the hour had added thirty minutes to eternity.

"Hell, you've been long!" he said when Battersea arrived, out of breath and pale. "What kept you?" he added vexedly.

"Give me some money!" Battersea said. Wentworth looked at him, then took out a wallet, filled with bills, and said shortly: "How much?"

"Twenty or thirty," Battersea said briskly. Wentworth gave it to him, merely saying: "What became of all of your money?"

"That was an awful case," Battersea answered irrelevantly. "I gave the fellow all the money I had with me."

"You did what?" Wentworth's voice rose almost to a scream. "He was drunk!"

"Drunk?" cried Battersea. "Drunk? You fool! He fainted—the ambulance doctor said—from starvation! Drunk? The man was starving!"

THE EXCEPTION

UP in the orchard a robin
Is telling a tale—
Hear how he chuckles! the laughter
Is almost a gale!

Down in the meadow a brooklet
Is humming along;
Busily working, he's finding
There's time for a song.

Gay through the maples a zephyr
(A child-wind, you know)
Startles the leaves in his playing
And laughs from below.

Often I think as I listen
That we are alone
Glum in a world where laughter
Is everywhere known!



The Log-Book

By the Editor

JUST fifty-three years ago, that is to say, on April 6, 1866, at Decatur, Illinois, was formed an organization whose numbers are now pitifully few. Indeed, no longer does one hear at parades—as I did some twenty years ago—“Oh, come, we needn’t wait any longer. It’s only the Grand Army of the Republic,” for somehow, somehow, the sentiment attaching to those veterans of the Civil War as they filed past, rank after rank, in their faded blue uniforms, seemed to have flickered out. Is it true that, after all, republics *are* ungrateful? There is now a movement on foot to create a body of American veterans of the world war, and thus perpetuate the memories of the greatest fight for high ideals that was ever waged. Will these, too, I wonder, be treated with the same contemptuous disdain as the years go by, and shall they have to wait until their numbers thin and there are only a handful of survivors to hobble along on November 11 to be greeted with the ringing cheers that are showered on the few blue-coated marchers in the Decoration Day parades of to-day? No men deserve more of their country than those who have risked their lives for it, and its gratitude should never die.

* * *

We are all heirs of opportunity, but we are seldom among those present at the distribution of fortune’s favors—at least, that is the lot of the average man or woman.

“A CLASH OF IDENTITIES”

BY HARRY STEPHEN KEELER

a three-part serial beginning in THE ARGOSY for April 12, features every quality to make a story interesting—suspense, characterization, problem. *Ward Sharlow*’s sixty-eight cents represented his entire worldly wealth—not a particularly weighty sum with which to fight life’s battle, you’ll say, but—well, from the moment of his meeting with the mysterious *Belzar* events began to happen with the speed clutch thrown into high, and at the driving finish it was at last given to him to see himself as others saw him—to acquire and hold a treasure that was indeed gold even if it could not be measured in pounds, or rupees, for instance, or mohurs, or dollars and cents.

Speed is the key-note of this engrossing yarn.

* * *

A prize-fight story that is “different”—that’s what I’m going to give you in next week’s ARGOSY. And the title:

“NOT ACCORDING TO QUEENSBURY”

BY GEORGE C. JENKS

is only a faint indication of what is in store for you. Romance and chivalry remain with us even in these prosaic days of modern progress, and if you want a thrill of the good old-fashioned sort, yet with a surprising twist in its presentment, don’t fail to

read Mr. Jenks's unusual yarn. In this swift-moving story the very setting is as unique in its way as is the story itself. This is a complete novelette in THE ARGOSY for April 12.



Money is invariably interesting, not only to have in one's purse, but to read about. Money in large quantities figures in engrossing fashion in one of our next week's shorts, "IT WON'T HAPPEN AGAIN," by Loring Brent. It's an odd story, as well as an absorbing one, and I shall be particularly eager to hear what you think of it. In "WISE AS A SERPENT" Francis James gets away with quite a new species of detective yarn, and I'm wondering now how many of you will be able to lay your finger on the really guilty party before you reach the exposure. This country is unique in possessing the great chain of lakes that lie to the north of the United States, and Charles Wesley Sanders is a master-hand at serving them up as background to stirring tales of adventure that have all the lure, if not the salt tang of the sea. In "ALONE" he is quite up to his best, and gives you, in addition, a side view of human nature that is not often held up for your inspection. Nor do the three foregoing by any means exhaust the array of spirited narratives that will go to make THE ARGOSY of April 12 very much worth while.



GLAD OF THE "RAILROAD MAN'S" MERGER

Modesto, California.

As I have never seen a letter from here, will write to let you know our appreciation of THE ARGOSY. There are no stories like C. A. Seltzer's; Olin Lyman's "Cuthford—Soldier of the Sea" is also great. I am glad to see THE ARGOSY and *Railroad Man's Magazine* together. Long life and success to them both.

MRS. J. W. HARTE.

WE HAVE A FULL SUPPLY OF POETRY

Cambridge, Massachusetts.

When it's time for THE ARGOSY to come, you will always find us home and waiting. I have read THE ARGOSY for about four years, and can't find fault so far. I like the short stories and novelettes best. I am fifteen years old this month, and have been writing poetry for some years as a pastime. Do you give any money for poems? If you do, I would like to hear from you through the Log-Book, as I would like to earn some pocket money. I remain,

HARRY C. KRAMER.

WATCH FOR A GREAT WESTERN TALE BY JOHN FREDERICK

Douglas, Arizona.

I have been thinking for over a year that I would add a letter of appreciation to your Log-Book. The first copy of THE ARGOSY I remember reading was about five years ago, when it contained "The Lone Star Ranger" and "The Last of the Duane's." Those stories made me look forward to THE ARGOSY. Zane Grey, in my opinion, comes first with the Western stories; following close second, Charles Alden Seltzer. With those two writers on your staff THE ARGOSY will hold all who like Western stories. Of course I like your short stories, such as mining, logging,

and ranching. "Square Deal Sanderson" was great, and I appreciate your surprise in giving "Forbidden Trails," by Seltzer. Sincerely yours, for Western stories,

EARL V. SANDS.

COULDN'T WAIT

Eagle, Idaho.

It is all right that you didn't send me the December 21 number, because I was so interested in the story, "Square Deal Sanderson," that I couldn't wait for it to come. So I went and got it at a news-stand. You can send me the next two issues following.

I think your Log-Book is exceptionally good. I always turn to it first. I do not see how some people can find fault with THE ARGOSY. I always like every story. I suppose this letter will be quietly laid to rest in the waste-basket.

Wishing success to THE ARGOSY, I remain,

MRS. M. R. P.

P. S.—If put in your Log-Book, use initials only.

ARGOSY WANTS THE BEST ONLY

San Antonio, Texas.

I have been reading THE ARGOSY for some time, and find it the best thing yet. I am still in high school, but I write short stories that are sometimes considered good. Do you require the authors of the short stories you publish to be experienced? Some one said you accepted them from amateurs sometimes. Is this true? I would like to see one of mine in print. Please answer my letter through the Log-Book. Wishing THE ARGOSY the greatest of success,

MILDRED CLEVELAND.

We prefer to have our authors experienced, and I am sure our readers do, too. As I have already stated, THE ARGOSY is not to be considered a training-field for writers. This is not to imply

that a new author may not produce good work. We examine all stories submitted, and if we find a crackerjack, are only to ready to accept and pay for same.

A JOY IN THE FAMILY

Detroit, Michigan.

I am enclosing ten cents in stamps, for which please send me a copy of THE ARGOSY for December 7, 1918. My wife and myself are constant readers of THE ARGOSY and occasionally the *All-Story Weekly*. We both think THE ARGOSY is the best all-around story magazine published. I have just finished the short stories for this week, January 4, and think that "Black Pearl's Year" and "Cuthford—Soldier of the Sea" were fine. I dislike to wait for each instalment of the serials, and to get around that, I wait until I have the story complete. I can't name any one story that I like any better than the rest; I think they are all just fine. If I may suggest it, I think just one long, complete novelette is better than two short ones. You may publish this if you see fit.

EARL E. BARE.

SELTZER'S NEXT IS "BEAU RAND"

452 N. Fifteenth Street,
Tacoma, Washington.

Will you please send me THE ARGOSY for January 4, with the conclusion of "Square Deal Sanderson," as I was sick, so I missed it at the news-stand. I think that is the right date, but I am not sure. I have been a reader of THE ARGOSY for about a year, and it is the best magazine out. I have tried them all, but none can beat it. I like the stories by Charles Alden Seltzer best, so give us plenty of them. Your short stories are first rate, so are your novelettes. Hoping to see this in print, I am, yours for THE ARGOSY, and may it have a long life.

LLOYD B. LARSEN.

In the Log of March 1 an unfortunate typographical error announced the name of Mr. Seltzer's next ARGOSY hero as Bean in place of *Beau Rand*. It's a great tale, and when you read it you will quickly discover that young *Rand* is far from being any sort of Bean.

NO SEQUEL TO "IMBECILE PRINCE"

503 E. Fourth,
Wellington, Kansas.

Most every one writes you and makes requests and boosts THE ARGOSY. Well, I have read the other fellows' letters, and will now send one myself containing a boost and a request. I like your Western stories, and have lived all over the Southwest, so I prefer some other stories once in a while, which I get; much obliged to the editor. Several years ago, when THE ARGOSY and *Cavalier* were what THE ARGOSY and *All-Story Weekly* are now, there was a story published called "The Prince Imbecile" or the "Imbecile Prince." Would like a sequel to it, or to have it republished. Of course we want "America First," but we like a little foreign flavor once in a while.

But please leave the German flavor *out*, as it is a bad taste. Now, hoping I will see this in a future ARGOSY, I will say that I am twenty-seven, and have read THE ARGOSY and *All-Story Weekly* magazines since I was thirteen years of age, or somewhere thereabout. And there is no equal or near equal magazine published. I like all of the stories published, but give us the sequel.

Always a booster,

WM. ALLEN.

P. S.—As I was in the army a while, I missed a few numbers, so if a sequel was published, let me know when.

COWMEN AS THEY WERE

Houston, Texas.

I saw a letter from Douglas, Wyoming, unsigned, in the Log-Book, regarding the heroes of Western stories, and I guess he is right about the present cowboy, though as a kid I have seen the kind they use as types for the average Westerner.

I lived in that neck of the woods, and have ridden from old Fort Sidney—now plain Sidney—Nebraska, to the Powder River country in Wyoming, up the north fork of the Platte River, past Minatare, Geering, *et cetera*, into the sister State; also up the Pumpkin Seed Creek past Wildcat Mountain into the Chugwater and Crazy Horse Creek country of Wyoming. I have visited the old P. F. Outfit, also the Wendover country, and the circle Arrow down by Cheyenne. Four years I lived at the base of the Big Horn in Nebraska, twenty-two miles east of the Wyoming line, and knew personally old-time punchers like Charley Dick, Pete Larson, known as Gunny Sock Pete; and Sheriff Jeff Carr, of Cheyenne, Wyoming, was my ideal of a Western sheriff, is yet, for that matter.

And in those days the boys wore guns, and they were not "bad men" either. The guns were usually for another purpose, as any old-time cowman will tell you. Why can't we have these types drawn for us, who look back upon kid days with a fondness that grows as we grow older? Stories sometimes don't suit me, but, as a whole, THE ARGOSY does. Only I hate to think of anybody saying, "There ain't no such"; horse-cars are obsolete now, but they used to was.

Hoping you are not offended, I am going to admit I rather roasted an author in your sister publication, and sign myself,

"ARGOSY fan,"

W. H. WALTERS.

P. S.—Old-timers will recall the names I mentioned, I am sure.

ANOTHER HOPKINS BOOSTER

Eveleth, Minnesota.

Just a few lines to let you know what I think of THE ARGOSY. I have been an ARGOSY reader for some time, and think it's the best magazine on earth. I have just finished reading "Square Deal Sanderson." It sure was great. I like all the stories, both serials and short, but the Western stories cannot be beaten. Mr. Editor, don't you think THE ARGOSY would be much better if you could keep one Western serial running all the time? I am sure it would. I wish THE ARGOSY were a daily. Have heard much praise about "Riddle Gawne," by Charles Alden Seltzer, so I

want to get that story. Please tell me if I can get it, and also tell me the price. You can do this through the Log-Book, for I will not give my name for the first time. Will tell you pay-day when I send my four dollars to you.

Now, on January 25 I saw a letter in the Log-Book, from a party who said that "Tessie of Rainbow Glen," by S. W. Hopkins, was rotten. I have read that story and didn't find any fault with it. Some of your readers said it was written for babies. Well, I'm not seventeen, so I guess I am in the class with the babies yet. I'd like to get another story by Hopkins.

Well, this is the first letter from Eveleth, although I know many who read THE ARGOSY. I get my money's worth out of the Log-Book alone. I heard many of my friends say so. Excuse my long letter for the first time. It would take all year to write all the praise for THE ARGOSY. Wish best luck to all your authors, yourself, Mr. Editor, and the famous ARGOSY. I shall be its reader until the end. If this goes in the Log-Book, please sign me

SPAGHETTI JUNCTION.

P. S.—Miss Wiley must have had a bad headache when she wrote that letter. If she didn't like the story, why did she read it? The story was good.

"Riddle Gawne" started in next to the last monthly issue of THE ARGOSY, that is to say, September, 1917, and continued on through the next seven issues, ending in that for November 10, 1917—eight issues in all, which will be mailed you on receipt of the price, \$1.60—twenty cents each.

A CANADIAN AT WHITE HEAT

Vancouver, British Columbia.

I'm writing you this letter in a real "white heat," Mr. Editor, and I suppose you will get many more like it, as there will, no doubt, be many people among the readers of your Log-Book with a spark of good will to the brave boys of the Allies who have been fighting for us all these long, weary years. All this anger has been aroused by reading a letter in THE ARGOSY Log-Book last night, when I just received my copy of January 25. This letter was signed, "Girl of the Golden West," who says that she does not believe in corresponding with strangers, and at the same time has her letter open for millions to read. Now, the trouble all centers round the point that this dear lady thinks it a breach of etiquette to cheer up a poor soldier who is giving up everything, and facing death and even worse than death.

Does she ever think what it can mean to a boy to see all his companions reading letters from home, while he alone stands with hungry, starved heart for some little token of good will from across the seas, and yet none comes? A true woman could have easily written kind words to some boy like this, and there were hundreds and even thousands of them in the muddy, rat-infested trenches of Flanders who would have felt grateful. We Canadian girls have written to hundreds of boys for the last four years, sending small parcels, *et cetera*, and by the letters we have received from our boys, we know they were appreciated; and they did not think any the less of us for writing to "strangers." We do not expect

ever to meet those boys; our correspondence only continued while those boys needed a line from their native land. Of course many of them have long since been laid to rest in some rough, neglected grave; but we know this much, that while they lived and suffered to keep us free from slavery, we, at least, were not afraid of what Mrs. Grundy would say, to show some motherless or friendless boy that all women are not heartless. There are thousands of married women, too, in all the countries where the Allies' flag waves that have written cheerful letters to their soldier boys, and yet they are true women, doing it with all the warmth of their hearts, and not with the desire to carry on a flirtation, as the letter from the "Girl of the Golden West" seemed to imply.

I am awfully sorry to rave like this to you, Mr. Editor; but, honest, I haven't said half that was in my heart, because I'm afraid I'd write a bookful if I did; but it hurts to think that any one, can be so narrow-minded in a case like this, after all those boys have done. If that lady who has aroused the temper under my fiery locks could see the boys that have returned all crippled and maimed from out of the very jaws of hell, and know that many, many of her own friends would never return, and if she had brothers and relations of her own among the maimed and missing, *perhaps* she would have some real red blood flow straight to her heart.

But I don't think any of our boys—Tommies Sammies, or Jackies—who have read her letter would ever want or expect one word of sympathy from her; and, what's more, they don't need sympathy, but they did need a letter to make them feel they "belonged."

In passing, I would like to say that I have been a faithful reader of both THE ARGOSY and the *All-Story Weekly* for many years, and thought that I could pass my opinion right along with others of your Log-Book readers. Both of those books are dandy. I like the serials as well as the short stories. Might say I'm heartily disgusted when I read any knocks about "this story and that" in your books. Let the knocker sit down and write a story himself and give it up to other people to criticise, and just see how pleasant it would feel to have the "child of his brain" picked to pieces. Life's too short for knocks, and if one story doesn't appeal to his peculiar kind of taste, why, turn over the page, because if it's an *All-Story Weekly* or ARGOSY, there is sure to be ten good stories for every indifferent one. All good luck to your magazine, for

My opinion, publicly expressed,
Is, to all good magazines this goes to, the best.

And please forgive a "sore-headed" Canuck for taking up so much of your valuable time.

Sincerely yours,
V. VICTOR.

In justification of "Girl of the Golden West," it should be explained that the United States government came to take her view of correspondence with strangers, even if the latter were in the position of fighting for the country from which the letters came. It may be observed also that with us no parcels were permitted to be sent to the soldiers in France on account of the necessity to conserve space in the ships.

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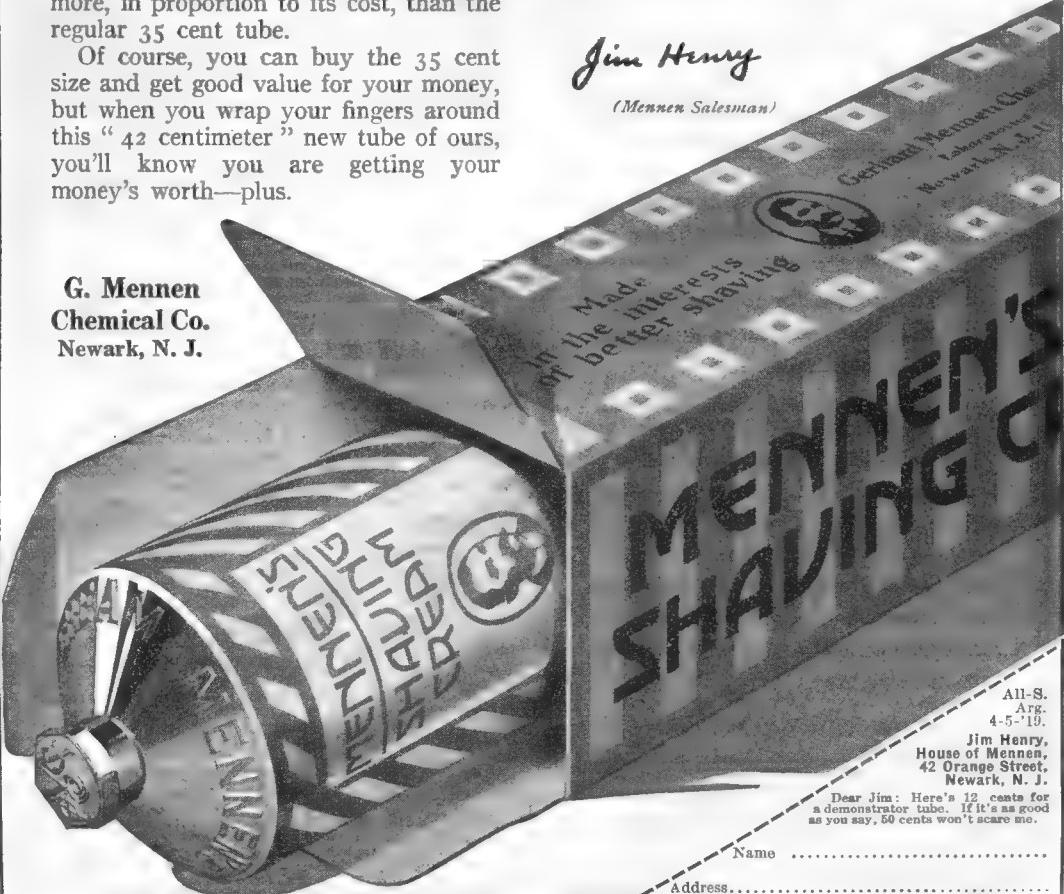
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(Mennen Salesman)



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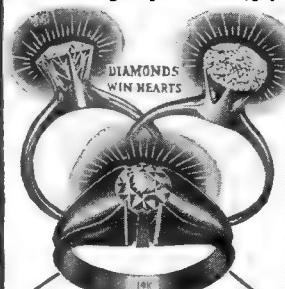
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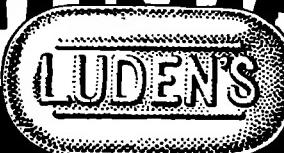
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Write this circle at the beginning of *L* and you will have *Ed*.

By letting the circle remain open it will be a hook, and this hook stands for *A*. Thus

will be *Ad*. Add another *A* at the end, thus

and you will have a girl's name, *Ade*.

From *M* eliminate the initial and final strokes and

will remain, which is the Paragon symbol for *O*.

For the longhand *m*, which is made of 7 strokes, you use this one horizontal stroke

Therefore,

would be *Me*.

Now continue the *E* across the *M*, so as to add *D*—thus

and you will have *Med*.

Now add the large circle for *O*, and you will have

(medo), which is Meadow, with the silent *A* and *W* omitted.

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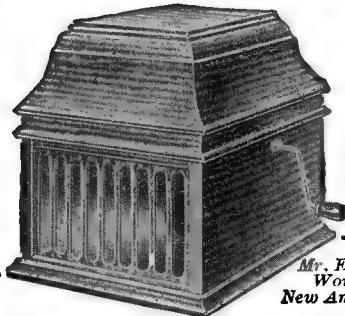
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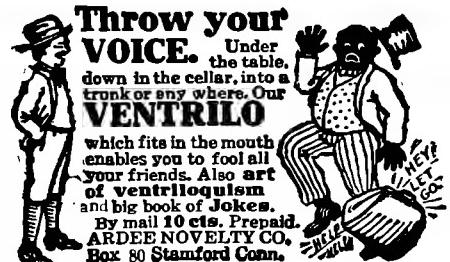
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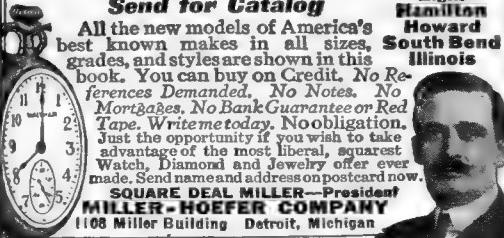
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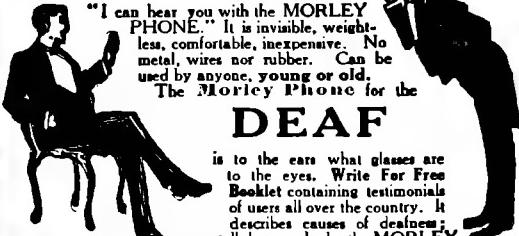
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